

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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THE MOONSTONE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," &c. &c.

SECOND PERIOD. THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH. (1848—1849.)

THIRD NARRATIVE.

THE NARRATIVE OF FRANKLIN BLAKE.

CHAPTER IX.

The doctor's pretty housemaid stood waiting for me, with the street-door open in her hand. Pouring brightly into the hall, the morning light fell full on the face of Mr. Candy's assistant when I turned, and looked at him.

It was impossible to dispute Betteredge's assertion that the appearance of Ezra Jennings, speaking from the popular point of view, was against him. His gipsy complexion, his fleshless cheeks, his gaunt facial bones, his dreamy eyes, his extraordinary parti-coloured hair, the puzzling contradiction between his face and figure which made him look old and young both together—were all more or less calculated to produce an unfavourable impression of him on a stranger's mind. And yet—feeling this as I certainly did—it is not to be denied that Ezra Jennings made some inscrutable appeal to my sympathies, which I found it impossible to resist. While my knowledge of the world warned me to answer the question which he had put, by acknowledging that I did indeed find Mr. Candy sadly changed, and then to proceed on my way out of the house—my interest in Ezra Jennings held me rooted to the place, and gave him the opportunity of speaking to me in private about his employer, for which he had been evidently on the watch.

"Are you walking my way, Mr. Jennings?" I said, observing that he held his hat in his hand. "I am going to call on my aunt, Mrs. Ablewhite."

Ezra Jennings replied that he had a patient to see, and that he was walking my way.

We left the house together. I observed that the pretty servant girl—who was all smiles and amiability, when I wished her good morning on my way out—received a modest little message from Ezra Jennings, relating to the time at which he might be expected to return, with pursed-up lips, and with eyes which ostentatiously looked anywhere rather than look in his

face. The poor wretch was evidently no favourite in the house. Out of the house, I had Betteredge's word for it that he was unpopular everywhere. "What a life!" I thought to myself, as we descended the doctor's door-steps.

Having already referred to Mr. Candy's illness on his side, Ezra Jennings now appeared determined to leave it to me to resume the subject. His silence said significantly, "It's your turn now." I, too, had my reasons for referring to the doctor's illness; and I readily accepted the responsibility of speaking first.

"Judging by the change I see in him," I began, "Mr. Candy's illness must have been far more serious than I had supposed?"

"It is almost a miracle," said Ezra Jennings, "that he lived through it."

"Is his memory never any better than I have found it to-day?" He has been trying to speak to me——"

"Of something which happened before he was taken ill?" asked the assistant, observing that I hesitated.

"Yes."

"His memory of events, at that past time, is hopelessly enfeebled," said Ezra Jennings. "It is almost to be deplored, poor fellow, that even the wreck of it remains. While he remembers, dimly, plans that he formed—things, here and there, that he had to say or do, before his illness—he is perfectly incapable of recalling what the plans were, or what the thing was that he had to say or do. He is painfully conscious of his own deficiency, and painfully anxious, as you must have seen, to hide it from observation. If he could only have recovered, in a complete state of oblivion as to the past, he would have been a happier man. Perhaps we should all be happier," he added, with a sad smile, "if we could but completely forget!"

"There are some events surely in all men's lives," I replied, "the memory of which they would be unwilling entirely to lose?"

"That is, I hope, to be said of most men, Mr. Blake. I am afraid it cannot truly be said of all. Have you any reason to suppose that the lost remembrance which Mr. Candy tried to recover—while you were speaking to him just now—was a remembrance which it was important to you that he should recal?"

In saying those words, he had touched, of his own accord, on the very point upon which I

was anxious to consult him. The interest I felt in this strange man had impelled me, in the first instance, to give him the opportunity of speaking to me; reserving what I might have to say, on my side, in relation to his employer, until I was first satisfied that he was a person in whose delicacy and discretion I could trust. The little that he had said, thus far, had been sufficient to convince me that I was speaking to a gentleman. He had what I may venture to describe as the *unsought self-possession*, which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilised world. Whatever the object which he had in view, in putting the question that he had just addressed to me, I felt no doubt that I was justified—so far—in answering him without reserve.

"I believe I have a strong interest," I said, "in tracing the lost remembrance which Mr. Candy was unable to recall. May I ask whether you can suggest to me any method by which I might assist his memory?"

Ezra Jennings looked at me, with a sudden flash of interest in his dreamy brown eyes.

"Mr. Candy's memory is beyond the reach of assistance," he said. "I have tried to help it often enough, since his recovery, to be able to speak positively on that point."

This disappointed me; and I owned it.

"I confess you led me to hope for a less discouraging answer than that," I said.

Ezra Jennings smiled. "It may not, perhaps, be a final answer, Mr. Blake. It may be possible to trace Mr. Candy's lost recollection, without the necessity of appealing to Mr. Candy himself."

"Indeed? Is it an indiscretion, on my part, to ask—how?"

"By no means. My only difficulty in answering your question, is the difficulty of explaining myself. May I trust to your patience, if I refer once more to Mr. Candy's illness; and if I speak of it this time, without sparing you certain professional details?"

"Pray go on! You have interested me already in hearing the details."

My eagerness seemed to amuse—perhaps, I might rather say, to please him. He smiled again. We had by this time left the last houses in the town behind us. Ezra Jennings stopped for a moment, and picked some wild flowers from the hedge by the roadside. "How beautiful they are!" he said, simply, showing his little nosegay to me. "And how few people in England seem to admire them as they deserve!"

"You have not always been in England?" I said.

"No. I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother—We are straying away from our subject, Mr. Blake; and it is my fault. The truth is, I have associations with these modest little hedgeside flowers—it doesn't matter; we were speaking of Mr. Candy. To Mr. Candy let us return."

Connecting the few words about himself which

thus reluctantly escaped him, with the melancholy view of life which led him to place the conditions of human happiness in complete oblivion of the past, I felt satisfied that the story which I had read in his face was, in two particulars at least, the story that it really told. He had suffered as few men suffer; and there was the mixture of some foreign race in his English blood.

"You have heard, I dare say, of the original cause of Mr. Candy's illness?" he resumed. "The night of Lady Verinder's dinner-party was a night of heavy rain. My employer drove home through it in his gig, and reached the house, wetted to the skin. He found an urgent message from a patient, waiting for him; and he most unfortunately went at once to visit the sick person, without stopping to change his clothes. I was myself professionally detained, that night, by a case at some distance from Frizinghall. When I got back the next morning, I found Mr. Candy's groom waiting in great alarm to take me to his master's room. By that time the mischief was done; the illness had set in."

"The illness has only been described to me, in general terms, as a fever," I said.

"I can add nothing which will make the description more accurate," answered Ezra Jennings. "From first to last, the fever assumed no specific form. I sent at once to two of Mr. Candy's medical friends in the town, both physicians, to come and give me their opinion of the case. They agreed with me that it looked serious; but they both strongly dissented from the view I took of the treatment. We differed entirely in the conclusions which we drew from the patient's pulse. The two doctors, arguing from the rapidity of the beat, declared that a lowering treatment was the only treatment to be adopted. On my side, I admitted the rapidity of the pulse, but I also pointed to its alarming feebleness as indicating an exhausted condition of the system, and as showing a plain necessity for the administration of stimulants. The two doctors were for keeping him on gruel, lemonade, barley water, and so on. I was for giving him champagne, or brandy, ammonia, and quinine. A serious difference of opinion, as you see! a difference between two physicians of established local repute, and a stranger who was only an assistant in the house. For the first few days, I had no choice but to give way to my elders and betters; the patient steadily sinking all the time. I made a second attempt to appeal to the plain, undeniably plain, evidence of the pulse. Its rapidity was unchecked, and its feebleness had increased. The two doctors took offence at my obstinacy. They said, 'Mr. Jennings, either we manage this case, or you manage it. Which is it to be?' I said, 'Gentlemen, give me five minutes to consider, and that plain question shall have a plain reply.' When the time had expired, I was ready with my answer. I said, 'You positively refuse to try the stimulant treatment?' They refused in so many

words. "I mean to try it at once, gentlemen."—"Try it, Mr. Jennings; and we withdraw from the case." I sent down to the cellar for a bottle of champagne; and I administered half a tumbler-full of it to the patient with my own hand. The two physicians took up their hats in silence, and left the house."

"You had assumed a serious responsibility," I said. "In your place, I am afraid I should have shrunk from it."

"In my place, Mr. Blake, you would have remembered that Mr. Candy had taken you into his employment, under circumstances which made you his debtor for life. In my place, you would have seen him sinking, hour by hour; and you would have risked anything, rather than let the one man on earth who had befriended you, die before your eyes. Don't suppose that I had no sense of the terrible position in which I had placed myself! There were moments when I felt all the misery of my friendlessness, all the peril of my dreadful responsibility. If I had been a happy man, if I had led a prosperous life, I believe I should have sunk under the task I had imposed on myself. But I had no happy time to look back at, no past peace of mind to force itself into contrast with my present anxiety and suspense—and I held firm to my resolution through it all. I took an interval in the middle of the day, when my patient's condition was at its best, for the repose I needed. For the rest of the four-and-twenty hours, as long as his life was in danger, I never left his bedside. Towards sunset, as usual in such cases, the delirium incidental to the fever came on. It lasted more or less through the night; and then intermitted, at that terrible time in the early morning—from two o'clock to five—when the vital energies even of the healthiest of us are at their lowest. It is then that Death gathers in his human harvest most abundantly. It was then that Death and I fought our fight over the bed, which should have the man who lay on it. I never hesitated in pursuing the treatment on which I had staked everything. When wine failed, I tried brandy. When the other stimulants lost their influence, I doubled the dose. After an interval of suspense—the like of which I hope to God I shall never feel again—there came a day when the rapidity of the pulse slightly, but appreciably, diminished; and, better still, there came also a change in the beat—an unmistakable change to steadiness and strength. Then, I knew that I had saved him; and then I own I broke down. I laid the poor fellow's wasted hand back on the bed, and burst out crying. An hysterical relief, Mr. Blake—nothing more! Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!"

He made that bitterly professional apology for his tears, speaking quietly and unaffectedly, as he had spoken throughout. His tone and manner, from beginning to end, showed him to be especially, almost morbidly, anxious not to set himself up as an object of interest to me.

"You may well ask, why I have wearied you with all these details?" he went on. "It is the only way I can see, Mr. Blake, of properly introducing to you what I have to say next. Now you know exactly what my position was, at the time of Mr. Candy's illness, you will the more readily understand the sore need I had of lightening the burden on my mind by giving it, at intervals, some sort of relief. I have had the presumption to occupy my leisure, for some years past, in writing a book, addressed to the members of my profession—a book on the intricate and delicate subject of the brain and the nervous system. My work will probably never be finished; and it will certainly never be published. It has none the less been the friend of many lonely hours; and it helped me to while away the anxious time—the time of waiting, and nothing else—at Mr. Candy's bedside. I told you he was delicious, I think? And I mentioned the time at which his delirium came on?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had reached a section of my book, at that time, which touched on this same question of delirium. I won't trouble you at any length with my theory on the subject—I will confine myself to telling you only what it is your present interest to know. It has often occurred to me in the course of my medical practice, to doubt whether we can justifiably infer—in cases of delirium—that the loss of the faculty of speaking connectedly, implies of necessity the loss of the faculty of thinking connectedly as well. Poor Mr. Candy's illness gave me an opportunity of putting this doubt to the test. I understand the art of writing in shorthand; and I was able to take down the patient's 'wanderings,' exactly as they fell from his lips.—Do you see, Mr. Blake, what I am coming to at last?"

I saw it clearly, and waited with breathless interest to hear more.

"At odds and ends of time," Ezra Jennings went on, "I reproduced my shorthand notes, in the ordinary form of writing—leaving large spaces between the broken phrases, and even the single words, as they had fallen disconnectedly from Mr. Candy's lips. I then treated the result thus obtained, on something like the principle which one adopts in putting together a child's 'puzzle.' It is all confusion to begin with; but it may be all brought into order and shape, if you can only find the right way. Acting on this plan, I filled in the blank spaces on the paper, with what the words or phrases on either side of it suggested to me as the speaker's meaning; altering over and over again, until my additions followed naturally on the spoken words which came before them, and fitted naturally into the spoken words which came after them. The result was, that I not only occupied in this way many vacant and anxious hours, but that I arrived at something which was (as it seemed to me), a confirmation of the theory that I held. In plainer words, after putting the broken sentences toge-

ther, I found the superior faculty of thinking going on, more or less connectedly, in my patient's mind, while the inferior faculty of expression was in a state of almost complete incapacity and confusion."

"One word!" I interposed, eagerly. "Did my name occur in any of his wanderings?"

"You shall hear, Mr. Blake. Among my written proofs of the assertion which I have just advanced—or, I ought to say, among the written experiments, tending to put my assertion to the proof—there is one, in which your name occurs. For nearly the whole of one night, Mr. Candy's mind was occupied with something between himself and you. I have got the broken words, as they dropped from his lips, on one sheet of paper. And I have got the links of my own discovering which connect those words together, on another sheet of paper. The product (as the arithmeticians would say) is an intelligible statement—first, of something actually done in the past; secondly, of something which Mr. Candy contemplated doing in the future, if his illness had not got in the way, and stopped him. The question is whether this does, or does not, represent the lost recollection which he vainly attempted to find when you called on him this morning?"

"Not a doubt of it!" I answered. "Let us go back directly, and look at the papers!"

"Quite impossible, Mr. Blake."

"Why?"

"Put yourself in my position for a moment," said Ezra Jennings. "Would you disclose to another person what had dropped unconsciously from the lips of your suffering patient and your helpless friend, without first knowing that there was a necessity to justify you in opening your lips?"

I felt that he was unanswerable, here; but I tried to argue the question, nevertheless.

"My conduct in such a delicate matter as you describe," I replied, "would depend greatly on whether the disclosure was of a nature to compromise my friend, or not."

"I have disposed of all necessity for considering that side of the question, long since," said Ezra Jennings. "Wherever my notes included anything which Mr. Candy might have wished to keep secret, those notes have been destroyed. My manuscript-experiments at my friend's bedside, include nothing, now, which he would have hesitated to communicate to others, if he had recovered the use of his memory. In your case, I have even reason to suppose that my notes contain something which he actually wished to say to you—"

"And yet, you hesitate?"

"And yet, I hesitate. Remember the circumstances, under which I obtained the information which I possess! Harmless as it is, I cannot prevail upon myself to give it up to you, unless you first satisfy me that there is a reason for doing so. He was so miserably ill, Mr. Blake! and he was so helplessly dependent upon Me! Is it too much to ask, if I request you only to

hint to me what your interest is in the lost recollection—or what you believe that lost recollection to be?"

To have answered him with the frankness which his language and his manner both claimed from me, would have been to commit myself to openly acknowledging that I was suspected of the theft of the Diamond. Strongly as Ezra Jennings had intensified the first impulsive interest which I had felt in him, he had not overcome my unconquerable reluctance to disclose the degrading position in which I stood. I took refuge once more in the explanatory phrases with which I had prepared myself to meet the curiosity of strangers.

This time, I had no reason to complain of a want of attention on the part of the person to whom I addressed myself. Ezra Jennings listened patiently, even anxiously, until I had done.

"I am sorry to have raised your expectations, Mr. Blake, only to disappoint them," he said. "Throughout the whole period of Mr. Candy's illness, from first to last, not one word about the Diamond escaped his lips. The matter with which I heard him connect your name has, I can assure you, no discoverable relation whatever with the loss or the recovery of Miss Verinder's jewel."

We arrived, as he said those words, at a place where the highway along which we had been walking, branched off into two roads. One led to Mr. Ablewhite's house; and the other to a moorland village some two or three miles off. Ezra Jennings stopped at the road which led to the village.

"My way lies in this direction," he said. "I am really and truly sorry, Mr. Blake, that I can be of no use to you."

His voice told me that he spoke sincerely. His soft brown eyes rested on me for a moment with a look of melancholy interest. He bowed, and went, without another word, on his way to the village.

For a minute or more, I stood and watched him, walking farther and farther away from me; carrying farther and farther away with him what I now firmly believed to be the clue of which I was in search. He turned, after walking on a little way, and looked back. Seeing me still standing at the place where we had parted, he stopped, as if doubting whether I might not wish to speak to him again. There was no time for me to reason out my own situation—to remind myself that I was losing my opportunity, at what might be the turning point of my life, and all to flatter nothing more important than my own self-esteem! There was only time to call him back first, and to think afterwards. I suspect I am one of the rashest of existing men. I called him back—and then I said to myself, "Now there is no help for it. I must tell him the truth!"

He retraced his steps directly. I advanced along the road to meet him.

"Mr. Jennings," I said, "I have not treated you quite fairly. My interest in tracing Mr.

Candy's lost recollection, is not the interest of recovering the Moonstone. A serious personal matter is at the bottom of my visit to Yorkshire. I have but one excuse for not having dealt frankly with you in this matter. It is more painful to me than I can say, to mention to anybody what my position really is."

Ezra Jennings looked at me with the first appearance of embarrassment which I had seen in him yet.

"I have no right, Mr. Blake, and no wish," he said, "to intrude myself into your private affairs. Allow me to ask your pardon, on my side, for having (most innocently) put you to a painful test."

"You have a perfect right," I rejoined, "to fix the terms on which you feel justified in revealing what you heard at Mr. Candy's bedside. I understand, and respect, the delicacy which influences you in this matter. How can I expect to be taken into your confidence, if I decline to admit you into mine? You ought to know, and you shall know, why I am interested in discovering what Mr. Candy wanted to say to me. If I turn out to be mistaken in my anticipations, and if you prove unable to help me when you are really aware of what I want, I shall trust to your honour to keep my secret—and something tells me that I shall not trust in vain."

"Stop, Mr. Blake. I have a word to say, which must be said before you go any farther."

I looked at him in astonishment. The grip of some terrible emotion seemed to have seized him, and shaken him to the soul. His gipsy complexion had altered to a livid greyish paleness; his eyes had suddenly become wild and glittering; his voice had dropped to a tone—low, stern, and resolute—which I now heard for the first time. The latent resources in the man, for good or for evil—it was hard, at that moment, to say which—leapt up in him and showed themselves to me, with the suddenness of a flash of light.

"Before you place any confidence in me," he went on, "you ought to know, and you *must* know, under what circumstances I have been received into Mr. Candy's house. It won't take long. I don't profess, sir, to tell my story (as the phrase is) to any man. My story will die with me. All I ask, is to be permitted to tell you, what I have told Mr. Candy. If you are still in the mind, when you have heard that, to say what you have proposed to say, you will command my attention, and command my services. Shall we walk on?"

The suppressed misery in his face, silenced me. I answered his question by a sign. We walked on.

After advancing a few hundred yards, Ezra Jennings stopped at a gap in the rough stone wall which shut off the moor from the road, at this part of it.

"Do you mind resting a little, Mr. Blake?" he asked. "I am not what I was—and some things shake me."

I agreed of course. He led the way through the gap to a patch of turf on the heathy

ground, screened by bushes and dwarf trees on the side nearest to the road, and commanding in the opposite direction a grandly desolate view over the broad brown wilderness of the moor. The clouds had gathered, within the last half hour. The light was dull; the distance was dim. The lovely face of Nature met us, soft and still and colourless—met us without a smile.

We sat down in silence. Ezra Jennings laid aside his hat, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead, wearily through his startling white and black hair. He tossed his little nosegay of wild flowers away from him, as if the remembrances which it recalled were remembrances which hurt him now.

"Mr. Blake!" he said, suddenly. "You are in bad company. The cloud of a horrible accusation has rested on me for years. I tell you the worst at once. I am a man whose life is a wreck, and whose character is gone."

I attempted to speak. He stopped me.

"No," he said. "Pardon me; not yet. Don't commit yourself to expressions of sympathy which you may afterwards wish to recal. I have mentioned an accusation which has rested on me for years. There are circumstances in connexion with it that tell against me. I cannot bring myself to acknowledge what the accusation is. And I am incapable, perfectly incapable, of proving my innocence. I can only assert my innocence. I assert it, sir, on my oath, as a Christian. It is useless to appeal to my honour as a man."

He paused again. I looked round at him. He never looked at me in return. His whole being seemed to be absorbed in the agony of recollecting, and in the effort to speak.

"There is much that I might say," he went on, "about the merciless treatment of me by my own family, and the merciless enmity to which I have fallen a victim. But the harm is done; the wrong is beyond all remedy now. I decline to weary or distress you, sir, if I can help it. At the outset of my career in this country, the vile slander to which I have referred struck me down at once and for ever. I resigned my aspirations in my profession—obscurity was the only hope left for me. I parted with the woman I loved—how could I condemn her to share my disgrace? A medical assistant's place offered itself, in a remote corner of England. I got the place. It promised me peace; it promised me obscurity, as I thought. I was wrong. Evil report, with time and chance to help it, travels patiently, and travels far. The accusation from which I had fled, followed me. I got warning of its approach. I was able to leave my situation voluntarily, with the testimonials that I had earned. They got me another situation, in another remote district. Time passed again; and again the slander that was death to my character found me out. On this occasion I had no warning. My employer said, 'Mr. Jennings, I have no complaint to make against you; but you must set yourself right, or leave me.' I had but one choice—I left him. It's

useless to dwell on what I suffered after that. I am only forty years old now. Look at my face, and let it tell for me the story of some miserable years. It ended in my drifting to this place, and meeting with Mr. Candy. He wanted an assistant. I referred him, on the question of capacity, to my last employer. The question of character remained. I told him what I have told you—and more. I warned him that there were difficulties in the way, even if he believed me. 'Here, as elsewhere,' I said, 'I scorn the guilty evasion of living under an assumed name: I am no safer at Frizinghall than at other places from the cloud that follows me, go where I may.' He answered, 'I don't do things by halves—I believe you, and I pity you. If you will risk what may happen, I will risk it too.' God Almighty bless him! He has given me shelter, he has given me employment, he has given me rest of mind—and I have the certain conviction (I have had it for some months past) that nothing will happen now to make him regret it."

"The slander has died out?" I said.

"The slander is as active as ever. But when it follows me here, it will come too late."

"You will have left the place?"

"No, Mr. Blake—I shall be dead. For ten years past, I have suffered from an incurable internal complaint. I don't disguise from you that I should have let the agony of it kill me long since, but for one last interest in life, which makes my existence of some importance to me still. I want to provide for a person—very dear to me—whom I shall never see again. My own little patrimony is hardly sufficient to make her independent of the world. The hope, if I could only live long enough, of increasing it to a certain sum, has impelled me to resist the disease by such palliative means as I could devise. The one effectual palliative in my case, is—opium. To that all-potent and all-merciful drug, I am indebted for a respite of many years from my sentence of death. But even the virtues of opium have their limit. The progress of the disease has gradually forced me from the use of opium, to the abuse of it. I am feeling the penalty at last. My nervous system is shattered; my nights are nights of horror. The end is not far off now. Let it come—I have not lived and worked in vain. The little sum is nearly made up; and I have the means of completing it, if my last reserves of life fail me sooner than I expect. I hardly know how I have wandered into telling you this. I don't think I am mean enough to appeal to your pity. Perhaps, I fancy you may be all the reader to believe me, if you know that what I have said to you, I have said with the certain knowledge in me that I am a dying man. There is no disguising, Mr. Blake, that you interest me. I have attempted to make my poor friend's loss of memory the means of bettering my acquaintance with you. I have speculated on the chance of your feeling a passing curiosity about what he wanted to say, and of my

being able to satisfy it. Is there no excuse for my intruding myself on you? Perhaps there is some excuse. A man who has lived as I have lived has his bitter moments when he ponders over human destiny. You have youth, health, riches, a place in the world, a prospect before you—you, and such as you, show me the sunny side of human life, and reconcile me with the world that I am leaving, before I go. However this talk between us may end, I shall not forget that you have done me a kindness in doing that. It rests with you, sir, to say what you proposed saying, or to wish me good morning."

I had but one answer to make to that appeal. Without a moment's hesitation, I told him the truth, as unreservedly as I have told it in these pages.

He started to his feet, and looked at me with breathless eagerness as I approached the leading incident of my story.

"It is certain that I went into the room," I said; "it is certain that I took the Diamond. I can only meet those two plain facts by declaring that, do what I might, I did it without my own knowledge—"

Ezra Jennings caught me excitedly by the arm.

"Stop!" he said. "You have suggested more to me than you suppose. Have you ever been accustomed to the use of opium?"

"I never tasted it in my life."

"Were your nerves out of order, at this time last year? Were you unusually restless and irritable?"

"Yes."

"Did you sleep badly?"

"Wretchedly. Many nights I never slept at all."

"Was the birthday night an exception? Try, and remember. Did you sleep well on that one occasion?"

"I do remember! I slept soundly."

He dropped my arm as suddenly as he had taken it—and looked at me with the air of a man whose mind was relieved of the last doubt that rested on it.

"This is a marked day in your life, and in mine," he said, gravely. "I am absolutely certain, Mr. Blake, of one thing—I have got what Mr. Candy wanted to say to you, this morning, in the notes that I took at my patient's bedside. Wait! that is not all. I am firmly persuaded that I can prove you to have been unconscious of what you were about, when you entered the room and took the Diamond. Give me time to think, and time to question you. I believe the vindication of your innocence is in my hands!"

"Explain yourself, for God's sake! What do you mean?"

In the excitement of our colloquy, we had walked on a few steps, beyond the clump of dwarf trees which had hitherto screened us from view. Before Ezra Jennings could answer me, he was hailed from the high road by a man, in great agitation, who had been evidently on the look-out for him.

"I am coming," he called back; "I am coming as fast as I can!" He turned to me. "There is an urgent case waiting for me at the village yonder; I ought to have been there half an hour since—I must attend to it at once. Give me two hours from this time, and call at Mr. Candy's again—and I will engage to be ready for you."

"How am I to wait!" I exclaimed impatiently. "Can't you quiet my mind by a word of explanation before we part?"

"This is far too serious a matter to be explained in a hurry, Mr. Blake. I am not willfully trying your patience—I should only be adding to your suspense, if I attempted to relieve it as things are now. At Frizughall, sir, in two hours' time!"

The man on the high road hailed him again. He hurried away, and left me.

LEAVES FROM THE MAHOGANY TREE.

RED AND WHITE.

VERY few people know when port wine was first introduced into England. It began to be imported about 1675, when the conquest of Franche Comté while Turenne's dragoons were trampling down the Palatinate, rendered our shrewd wine merchants afraid of a general war, and a speedy failure in their supplies. The red wine began to pour in faster about 1679—the year of the battle of Bothwell Brig. The war with France in 1689 also gave an impetus to the new trade. The Methuen Treaty of 1703, and the gradual increase of vexatious double duties on the wines of Bordeaux and Lyons completed the transformation, and the drinker of Burgundy and claret became a port wine drinker thenceforward. Let any painter who wants to produce a great allegorical fresco for the cellars of the London Docks, represent Gout and Rheumatism (a grisly pair) sitting together on the chalk-stone cliffs of Dover, smiling a bitter welcome at the arrival of the first vessel laden with port. The date of the last arrival of real port we have found impossible to ascertain.

Pure port is really a sort of Burgundy, pure, fresh, and with a fine bouquet; it is sometimes rose, sometimes purple in colour, perfectly transparent, improving with age. It is excellent mulled (we have performed elaborate experiments on it, and can testify to the fact), but the port sent to England is, as every Portuguese merchant knows, coloured with elderberry juice, and three times mixed with bad brandy—once when half fermenting, to check further fermentation and retain the sweetness; secondly, after racking; lastly, as a farewell dose before shipment. It has been computed by great authorities that a glass of our modern black, sweet, strong port wine contains as much alcohol as two-fifths of a glass of brandy. The natural dark purple, rough, astringent sweet wine, deriving its roughness and sharpness from the husk and seeds

of the grape, requires several years ascetic seclusion in the fostering wood to remove its sweetness and coarseness; and some time in bottle to develop its aroma. It ought to be richly tinted as a black ruby, soft, fruity, generous, free from sweetness, and not too astringent. Such was the wine that made Pitt eloquent, that lent wings to the honest words of Fox, and gave fire to the lightning flashes of Sheridan; but who could be witty after a heart-burn from modern port?

It is said that the bad port of London taverns can be imitated with any red or white wine, a little Roussillon, elder, or other fruit essence, logwood and spirit, blended with impudence, and vended by rascality. No wine can be so easily adulterated as port, and there is no wine (the best judges say) in which adulteration can be so little detected: new port being naturally coarse, sweet, and rough. Historical wine merchants tell us that this adulteration began about 1720, and increased in 1754. In 1756 a monopoly was granted to the Chartered Royal Wine Company, of Oporto, in order to restrain this abominable practice; but the company soon grew worse than the rogues they had combined to check.

At present, port wine is not merely the juice of the best Alto Douro grapes, grown on the hills round Oporto, but also Colares, Barra-a-Barra, Bucellas, Termo, Arinto, and Lisbon, all mixed together, and then deliberately thickened, fired, and darkened with elderberries, boiled grape juice, and brandy. This stuff is then sent over to England to be again brandied, darkened, and poisoned; for while the wine merchants dilute claret recklessly, they always try to thicken and heat port, until at last, at low public-houses, it becomes mere damson juice, mixed with bad spirit and burnt raisins. It is a fact that no pure port wine can be shipped from Portugal, as the government, Doctor Druitt says, will not give a pass for it, unless it is strong, dark, and sweet enough to mix with other wines, for which purpose it is never really used in England.

The best authorities tell us that the price of good port has doubled in the last fifteen years. After the vine disease, the production of port wine fell off from ninety-two thousand one hundred and twenty-two pipes to seventeen thousand three hundred and fifty-three pipes. In 1864, we imported of this horrible medicine three million three hundred and forty-four thousand eight hundred and seventy-one gallons; and in return the Portuguese took from us one million six hundred and thirty thousand three hundred and four gallons of spirits with which to doctor for our palates. The Portuguese will not drink this new wine; in Lisbon, indeed, it is considered a sort of liqueur, and regarded with furtive suspicion. We should like to know what proportion the whole wine produce of Portugal bears to the quantity of port wine drunk by the infatuated people in England.

What a "deformed fool this fashion is." Port is now a superstition; yet, when the

Methuen treaty first introduced it, Prior, Shenstone, and Pope, all derided the new deep wine, "the sluggish port." Armstrong, who joined in this cry, breaks forth in ecstasy about the wine of France and Germany:

The gay, serene, good-natured Burgundy,
Or the fresh fragrant vintage of the Rhine!

And Thomson, a fat man, of epicurean tendencies, passes port to lavish praises on the wine from Gascony and the hills of Lyons:

The claret smooth, red as the lips we press
In sparkling fancy while we drain the bowl;
The mellow-tasted Burgundy, and quick
As is the wit it gives, the gay champagne.

In spite of the old prejudice that claret is too cold for our northern stomach, it was drunk universally in Scotland long after it had ceased to be the fashionable beverage of England. There are traditions in Scotland that claret used to be taken round the towns in a cart, the driver selling quarts of it from the hogsheads to those who sent their servant lassies with their "tappit hens" and silver tankards.

The wine Burns had fetched for him in "a silver tassie" was claret, and it was claret his heroes of the whistle drank by the pailful. When the duties were altered, in order to force port wine on the Scotch, and drive out the produce of the French vineyards, Home, the author of Douglas, wrote that vigorous epigram:

Firm and erect the Caledonian stood,
Old was his mutton, and his claret good.
"Let him drink port," the English statesman cried:
He drank the poison, and his spirit died.

We are indebted for the introduction of port to Charles the Second's Portuguese wife. Charles's reign gave us also tea. Fatal gift! The great race of dramatists instantly ceased, and our costume became uglier. The grand oval Elizabethan face went out, and the double chin came in. We all know from Hogarth, the heavy sensual face of the early Georgian time: a lamentable falling off from the former age in intellectual expression and spiritual character. Red port was at the bottom of it, and we wonder that it did not lead to a French revolution in this country, for it established gout, and gout makes people crabbed and fretful, and fretful people don't like paying taxes, and are the planners of all revolutions. There was never a plot yet but a dyspeptic or a gouty man was at the bottom of it.

Let us get rid of this odious superstition of red and white—of what farmers call red port and white sherry—the supposed necessities of all conviviality. Why torment friends with elderberry juice and brandy, because it was the custom years ago to drink port when it was good and cheap? How much better a glass of pure honest hock with a perfume and inner warmth about it, a glass of rosy claret innocent and refreshing, or a bumper of full-toned manly Burgundy pressed from grapes warmed by the fire of southern sunshine! Clarets may be mixed, but then they are

purities mixed: not chemical drugs and brandy fused together in the witch's cauldron of the fraudulent chemist. There was some motive in drinking port when port was a generous tonic in age, freed from all the sins and follies of turbulent youth, but now—pah! Let heroes arise among us bold enough to say to their friends after dinner, "I don't keep port now, since it has become so bad and so dear; but here's some hock I can recommend, and here's some fair claret."

It must always be remembered that these mutations in diet, such as the change from claret to port, are not the result of deliberate thought or wise premeditation. They are the result of commercial accident, a war, or a treaty. The change takes place, but no one thinks what the result of the change will be, or whether the new food is wholesome or dangerous. No one cares, when it begins to be fashionable, whether, like port, it will produce gout, and leave gout as a heirloom, or whether, like tea, it will increase nervous complaints, and bequeath weakened nerves. Fashion in this, as in other things, is eminently irrational.

One thing is certain; that the great Elizabethan men, the poets, soldiers, admirals, statesmen, and voyagers, did their work, not on port, but on sherry—pure sherry, probably. With blood warmed and enriched by sherry, they broke up the Armada and defied the Pope and the Spaniard. The stalwart men of earlier and rougher ages were nourished on neither port nor sherry. They drank Gascon wine—claret that is—and quaffed Burgundy. Strengthened by that wholesome liquor, they bore their load of armour, and jousted, tilted, fought, and slashed, from one end of Europe to the other. So as port is not indispensable to a brave man, perhaps in time we may learn to leave this expensive physic, and once more take to the real juice of the grape, before the chemist gets at it.

We scarcely know when sherry and canary first came into repute in England. Perhaps when Henry married Katherine of Arragon, to the horror of all ecclesiastics, she being the widow of his brother Arthur. Certainly not later; though the Spanish predilections of James, and Prince Charles's visit to Madrid in search of a wife, may have given fresh hints to the English wine drinker.

It was Canary (a sort of rich, dry Madeira) that the brave company at the Mermaid drank when old Ben Jonson, and Beaumont, and Herrick "outwatched the Bear;" it was the same amber-coloured cordial that shone in the glasses at the Devil, beside Temple Bar, when the Apollo Room grew electric with the wit of great poets, dramatists, and sages. Shakespeare has left us a glowing eulogy of sack (sec.)—pronounced sherris by the English, in the vain attempt to catch the Arabic guttural X in Xeres. Falstaff, in his sermon on sherry, with the twofold operation, dwells especially on its fire: so, perhaps, even then it was slightly brandied for our coarse market.

"It ascends me into the brain," says the fat knight, glowing with his recent victory over unsuspecting Sir Coleville of the Dale (one of the Derbyshire Colevilles, no doubt) "dries me there all the foolish, and dull, and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes, which delivered o'er to the voice the tongue, which is their birth, becomes excellent art. The second operation of your excellent sherris is the warming of the blood, which before cold and settled, left the liver white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice; but the sherris warms it, and makes it course from the inwards to the past extreme; it illuminates the face, which, as a beacon, gives warning to all the rest of the little kingdom man, to arm, and then the vital commoner, and inland petty spirits muster me to their captain, the heart, who, great and puffed up with this retinue, doth any deed of courage, and this valour comes of sherris. So that skill in the weapon is nothing without sack, for that sets it a work, and learning a mere hoard of gold kept by a devil, till sack commences and sets it in act and use."

What a deluge of fancy poured over the simple fact that sherry warms the blood and quickens the action of the brain! The lines, too, so fanciful and witty, are full of the medical learning of the day, when the skull was thought a sort of alembic, when melancholy was attributed to ill vapours, and when the liver was held to be the seat of courage. It will be remembered that in Macbeth Shakespeare calls a coward "a lily livered boy."

The Canaries only produce Teneriffe, Vidonia, and Malvasia, or Malvoisie. Vidonia is a green wine of good body. Teneriffe, a rich sweet wine. As one of the best species of Malaga wine is said to have originally come from the Rhine, and the Chasoselas of Fontainebleau from a Cyprus grape, the Canary vines are said to have come from Germany in the reign of Charles the Fifth. That pleasant letter-writer, Howell, who visited Spain in the reign of Charles the First, declares canary to be "the richest, most firm, best bodied, and lastingest wine, and the most defecated from all earthy grossness." We wish he could taste real Hamburg sherry prepared by a German Jew wine-merchant in that honest city, after his second bankruptcy. The poor Indian, of untutored mind, never tasted "the real fire-water of the white man" who never tasted that.

Howell (who was perhaps thinking of leaving his glass house and going into the wine business), gets quite excited as he continues to sip and write. "French wines," he says, "may be said to pickle meat in the stomach, but this is the wine that digests and doth not only breed good blood, but it nutritieth also, being a glutinous substantial liquor." (Then he gets quite chirpy). "Of this wine if of any other may be verified, that merry induction that good wine maketh good blood; good blood causeth good

humours; good humours cause good thoughts; good thoughts bring forth good works; good works help to carry a man to heaven. If this be true, surely more English go to heaven in this way than any other, for I think there is more canary brought into England than all the world besides."

This shows that, even in the seventeenth century, Madeira was too strong for the French or Spanish taste, and was chiefly sent to England. There is no doubt that our war with France in the reign of Charles the First, led us to rely more on Spain and the Canaries. Sherry is made of both red and white grapes dried in the sun for two or three days before they are pressed. The various shades of colour are owing to the different proportions of boiled grape syrup with which it is mixed—we all know what it ought to be. If Amontillado, pale, brilliant and with that indescribable flavour that comes accidentally in certain butts at Xeres, and is by some considered a disease. If *Vino de Pasto*, delicate and high flavoured, not so dry as the aristocratic Amontillado, but still *aunque moro hijo d'algo*. If *Manzanilla*, of a delicate straw-colour, with that strange tonic camomile flavour that many people like because it proclaims little alcohol and no acid. If a pure fine sherry, of a rich topaz colour shading into amber, the flavour dry and not sweet, but delicate, soft, and with a calm inner warmth that does not scorch the palate.

But what do we get now, short of sixty shillings the dozen, with the price looking upward ever since the vine disease of 1852, but a fiery, highly brandied wine flavoured with fine sherry, but darkened and enriched with boiled juice, and made piquant with Montilla, Manzanilla, or second-rate Amontillado. That is the doctor's stuff that generates heartburn, it is "hot and sickly sweat." It is a detestable thieving concoction flavoured with the new ethers, and perhaps sent by those Jew German robbers to Cadiz to be re-exported to England. There are instances in which Hamburg sherry, when examined at the Customs, is found to contain no grape juice at all. Such is the miserable apothecaries' draught, that the poorer middle class in England, who must have their wine cheap, insist on drinking because sherry is an old conventionality, and they will not learn to like claret, hock, or Burgundy, which (as yet) it is worth no one's while to adulterate.

That excellent authority, Dr. Druitt, from careful statistics shows that there is no hope for the man with moderate income ever to get good sherry again in our lifetimes. In 1850, the quantity shipped from Cadiz to Great Britain was three million eight hundred and twenty-six thousand seven hundred and sixty-four gallons; and in 1864, seven million eighty-one thousand and thirty-three, the consumption having latterly increased at the rate of about twelve per cent. per annum. The greater the demand, the more the new unfermented wines that can't travel without

being supported by incessant brandy, are sent to this country.

Awake, middle class! Arise, or be for ever poisoned. Drink the Szamorodny of Hungary, or the Greek wines, or even that produce of the Sicilian vintage—Marsala. Allow that the last is brandied, that it is earthy, or that there is an odious sub-acid that lingers in the palate after the wine has gone down. These trifles got over, it is a comparatively pure wine, and will improve by keeping. The national wine taste has gone wrong, is going worse, and must be redirected. Red and white are ghosts of their former selves, and must be laid in the Red or White Seas as soon as possible, or there will be no middle-class digestions left in England.

Alas, for the days of beeswing and tawny colour! Alas, for the days when wine left a colourless oil on the side of the glass to trickle proudly down and prove its ancient descent! Alas, for the time when we were brought in after dessert with a frill round our harmless necks, and were given a glass of old port on condition of drinking "Church and King!" Alas, for the day when our rich uncle, after much ceremony and flourish, went down into his cellar himself, and returned cobwebby, white about the arms, but triumphant, with a bottle of 'thirty-two, held as carefully as a tender infant! There are fine traditions about port, but we must surrender them, and start again. We must cast the dust off our feet against that den of thieves, Oporto, and hie (as they say in songs) to the merry vineyards of Johannisberg and Rudesheimer. We must shake hands with the Magyar and propitiate the Greek.

At present, it is not port we are drinking, but potato spirit, elderberry juice and syrup. It is not sherry, but potato spirit, methylated spirit, syrup and dregs. It is making fools of us; we give our birthright for these detestable messes of pottage. We are drinking bad and injurious medicine at the rate of three shillings a bottle, when we had better be taking quinine, tincture of cardamoms, or an honest glass of spirit and water, that is what it pretends to be.

It has often occurred to us that the convivial stories of the Georgian era prove a great falling off in the quality of modern wine. How else can we explain the number of bottles that those gouty old champions of the British Constitution used to put under their girdle? Could William Pitt have gone to the House of Commons after a bottle of our "very curious" port, and there have warmed his chilly heart with the best part of another?

The men then were not stancher—they could not work harder, or think longer, or ride faster, or walk farther. There was nothing better about the average of them, and yet we find a German traveller describing the sturdy Duke of York as finishing off six bottles of claret at a sitting. This was their special gift, and we wonder at it with an endless wonderment. What a providence that man is so elastic and expandible! The reason why these ancestors of

ours drank so much was perhaps this:—First and foremost, the wine was less brandied, it was older and better fermented. Their claret was comparatively good and pure. Their sherry was many degrees sounder, purer, older, and less spirituous than ours. They dined earlier, and sat for many hours over their wine. Let Hogarth's "Midnight Conversation," said to be the caricature of a Fenchurch-street Club, testify how they drank. Look at the piles of empty Florence flasks (the shape of oil flasks) that are heaped on the mantelpiece under the tell-tale clock! And now the wretches, headed by that reprobate clergyman whose thirst nothing can quench, are beginning with crown bowls of punch.

The worst of it is, that the old red and white conventionality gains ground daily in spite of the increased use of the wholesome French and German wines. Luxury has spread, is spreading, and probably will continue to spread, as our national wealth increases, and as our middle class grows more imitative and aspiring in its social habits. A class of people now call for sherry at railway buffets, roadside inns, and country town hotels, who a few years ago would not have thought of anything better than ale, or more *recherché* than brown brandy. If you call on a country farmer now, he is sure to offer you port and sherry. Twenty years ago he would have drawn a jug of ale. All these new quaffers of sherry are being educated by the honest Hamburg makers, and, unable from inexperience and blunted senses to appreciate bouquet or aroma, they want the most brandied and the brownest wine they can get. Inflamed by their satanic brewage, they raise their voices to chorus the old ridiculous invective against cold claret and light Burgundy, ignorant that it is the sweet wines and not the sour wines that produce acid, and gout. The power of intoxicating is the test to which these misguided people submit all wine.

The old superstition of white and red has held us long enough. We want once more, pure wholesome Gascon and Lyonnais wine, such as our ancestors, in the red hoods, welcomed from the stately carracks, laden with French purple-stained casks, at Dover or at Southampton. In a word, we want no more B. B., either from Germany or Portugal.

But, to conclude, we should explain what we mean by B. B. Once on a time an epicurean friend of ours used frequently to dine at the house of a certain gourmet of the county—very wealthy, very fond of good eating, very mean and selfish. Our friend (a shrewd man) had often noticed that when the ladies left and the run on the wine became sharper (people drank harder then), the butler came in and whispered to the host: upon which he generally replied, in the most earnest and emphatic way, "Yes, and mind the B. B." This so stirred his curiosity, that on one occasion, being on a visit, and meeting the butler out of doors before breakfast, he got him into conversation, and slipped a guinea into his hand.

"Davis," he said, "I want you to tell me, between ourselves—just as a matter of curiosity, you know—what year's wine that B. B. is that your master so often asks for."

A phosphorescent smile flitted across the face of Davis as he looked round at the house, and then coughed twice. "Lord bless you, sir!" he replied, "B. B.? That's no special vintage, that ain't. Don't you take any of that muck, sir. That's our *bottoms of bottles*!"

SAINT BUMBLE.

THE parish of St. Bumble is one of the oldest and most densely populated of the metropolis. It contains numerous narrow streets of little dirty cardboard two-story tenements, which are ill drained, and scarcely supplied with sufficient water to make the tea of the poor people who live in them—or rather the people who are compelled to huddle together in them to be poisoned with foul air and to die.

On account of this, there is a large demand for parochial relief; and the rates of St. Bumble have to pay smartly for his lack of accommodation and cleanliness. His saintship's guardians of the poor are alive to the difficulties of their patron; and they manage their funds as economically as possible, leaving sanitary reform to the vestry—who leave it to somebody else.

Our guardians are all men of responsible positions in the parish. They live well, and know, or pretend to know, what the flavour of good port is like. They have property in the parish, and are consequently interested in its welfare. The chairman had once a stiff tussle with the world, and came off with honour and a nice competency. His compeers have passed through much the same conditions of life. All have pushed themselves forward from small beginnings to comparatively great ends in the useful occupations of publicans, butchers, grocers, tallow-chandlers, cheesemongers, &c. They are good men in the main, but there are two things which often throw their goodness into shadow. First: they find it difficult to understand that in the nature of things it is impossible for everybody to be as successful in life as they have been themselves. Second: a growth out of the first—they are apt in their official capacities to act on the principle that Dives has a right to kick Lazarus, whether he grant or refuse him a crumb.

Scene: the board-room of St. Bumble's work-house. Ten guardians enter respectively, greeting each other in a jovial manner; laughing and chatting. The chairman takes his seat, the others follow his example, and as they drop on the chairs, their humanity drops from them.

Enter first applicant for relief: A little woman thinly clad, middle-aged, with pinched features, small nervous eyes, and the general bearing of a timid one who regards the world as an enemy. Accompanying her are a boy, aged about fourteen, and a girl, aged about twelve years. The children keep close to their parent

and look in awe furtively toward the wise men.

Chairman (loudly): "Well, what's the matter with you?"

Applicant (in a voice made hard by hopelessness): "My husband's been lying ill for six weeks. I go out charing; but now the children are out of work I ain't able to keep things going without help."

Chairman: "You shouldn't have children if you're not able to support them. You've been here before?"

Applicant (sorry for it): "Yes, sir."

Chairman: "Hope you won't come again." (A wish benevolent enough, but sounding like a threat. Then to the boy): "How do you get a living?"

Boy (frightened by the stern eyes bent on him, and which seem to be detecting him in a fib): "I was a light porter, sir; but I've lost my place."

Chairman: "What did you lose your place for?"

Boy (with increasing fright): "I wasn't strong enough, sir, and they got an older boy than me."

Chairman: "You ought to have worked harder, and you'd have kept your place." (To the girl): "And what have you been doing?"

Girl (timidly and clutching her mother's skirt): "I was learning to be a flower-maker, sir, and helping any way I could."

Chairman: "How much did you get for that?"

Girl (half crying): "Three shillings a week, sir."

Chairman (shocked): "And haven't you saved anything? You ought to be ashamed of yourself wasting time learning flower-making. (!) Why don't you go out as a servant? There's plenty of servants wanted in gentlemen's families." (Guardians nod approvingly, and frown on the wicked children.)

Girl (crying): "I can't get a place, sir, or I'd be glad to take it."

Chairman: "Stop blubbering. Two shillings a week for a month. What's the next case?"

Exeunt first applicants, and enter second applicant. A woman in a faded bonnet and a grey threadbare cloak, with which she endeavours to keep an infant warm. She is pale and weakly looking; apparently scarcely able to stand, and deeply sensible of humiliation. She is not offered a seat.

Chairman: "Well, what do you want us to do?"

Applicant (feebly): "My husband died three months ago. I pawned nearly everything we had to pay his funeral, and now I'm starving, and my child's dying."

Chairman: "Then go into the house."

Applicant: "I'm expecting my brother, sir, to come for us in a week or two."

Chairman (sharply): "So much the better. A ticket for a loaf and two shillings a week for three weeks."

Applicant is about to express her thanks,

but finds the words stick in her throat at sight of the indifferent faces around her. Exit.

A guardian (struck with a humane idea, and yawning): "I wonder if the tea is ready?"

Disturbance heard without. Enter relieving officer hurriedly.

Relieving officer: "Here's that Missus Blank again, and she won't go away without seeing the board."

Chairman (indignant): "She's after the hour; she'll have to wait our time. Is tea ready?"

Relieving officer: "Not quite, sir."

Chairman (making a virtue of the occasion with a bad grace): "Then we'll see the woman."

Enter third applicant: a woman of stout build, coarse features, and large red hands.

Chairman (sternly): "What have you been making a noise about?"

Applicant: "If you please, sir, they wasn't for letting me in."

Chairman: "They had no right to let you in—you're behind time."

Applicant: "I mistook the house, sir."

Chairman: "That's none of our business. What do you want?"

Applicant (crying): "My husband's gone away and left me." (Guardians look suspicious).

Chairman: "Send the police after him. What was he?"

Applicant: "A coster, sir, and he's taken away the barrow and left me nothing to get a living with."

Chairman (brusquely): "Get a basket."

Applicant: "I haven't got a farthing atwixt me and starvation, sir, let alone the price of a basket."

Chairman: "Then you ought to get work. There's plenty of work for them that's willing." (Guardians' heads nod in confirmation: "Plenty of work for them that's willing.") "A big strong woman like you ought to be ashamed to ask help from the parish."

Applicant (fervently): "And so I am, sir, God knows."

Relieving officer: "I've had a good deal of trouble with this woman, sir."

Chairman: "She'd better not trouble you much more. Eighteenpence a week for a month, and stop it if she doesn't behave herself."

Exit applicant, and the guardians adjourn to another apartment wherein a table is laid with all the appurtenances of a substantial tea. The guardians are mortal again.

Answer to a remonstrance offered, made by a guardian who was in his own family a kind husband and father.

"Do you expect us to pat them" (the poor) "on the head, call them good boys and girls, and tell them never to mind about work, that the parish will take care of them? Why, sir, it would be a premium upon idleness. I have as much commiseration for misfortune as any man can have; but it is not only misfortune

that sends us applicants for relief. More than half of them are idle vagabonds and lazy women. The parish expects us to keep down the poor rate, and we can't do that if we are to make it a smooth and pleasant thing to apply for relief. We can't always distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving, and we are compelled by our position to be sharp and hasty."

That is the guardians' theory, and its error is patent. Granting the difficulty of distinguishing between good and bad, the fact that one man is a vagabond is no argument for treating with indignity an honest man who may be simply unfortunate. Harsh tones and looks can make the simplest words sound very cruelly to the ears of one truly in trouble; but neither harsh words nor grudging gift will deter the scamp from seeking and accepting relief. It is only those who really should be helped, that wince under the sting.

Result: that the object of charity is wholly missed, and the poor-rate is kept down at the expense of the people whom it was righteously intended to serve.

BLOSSOM AND BLIGHT.

[In a letter to the Editor of the MANCHESTER COURIER, confirming the report of the extraordinary death-rate in some of the streets and courts of Manchester and Salford (one in ten per annum), Mr. James Higson, rent-collector, of Ardwick-green, Manchester, makes the following heart-touching statement. "As a last resort, old people, before they will enter the workhouse, huddle together in a room let at about a shilling per week, and there die. But they are not natives of the street. No; they were born where the apple-tree blossoms in spring, and the yellow corn waves in harvest."]

For the home 'mid the orchards where blithe the birds sing,

What wonder, dear children, each aged heart craves?

"They were born where the apple-tree blossoms in spring,"

And rippling "in harvest the yellow corn waves,"

They are worn the "old people;" they're weary and cold,

Are bent and are broken, are palsied and pale;

And they long for the meadows enamell'd with gold,
And pine for the blooms that scent Blackmore's sweet vale.*

They tremble and totter like babes on their feet,
They are jeer'd and they're jostled, and little boys cry,

"Ho, Gaffer! Ho, Gammer! run fast up the street,
The drums are aye beating, the Queen's coming by!"

They are feeble and famish'd; their faculties fail;
Past labour; past effort; past all but the grave.

Meek brothers in sorrow to list their sad tale,
No friend in the wide world, to succour or save.

* The apple-orchards in the Vale of Blackmore in the south of England, when in full bloom, form one of the most beautiful sights in England: a sea of blossoms rising upon the wind, and for miles scenting the air with a perfume vying in sweetness with that of the bean-flower, rapturously celebrated by the Poet of The Seasons.

In the workhouse, food, fuel, and raiment they say;
The home of the Pauper, they shrink from its
gloom:

So, weekly they club their scant halfpence to pay
With the Saturday's shilling, the rent of "a room."

There, childless, and friendless, and joyless, alas!—

They "huddle together," regarded of few;

"Last resort," a garret whose one square of glass
No sunbeam has ever stray'd pitying through:

And each looks on the face of his neighbour in woe,
And silent each quails at that visage of care,
And they think of the eyes that were bright long
ago,

And they scan the blank wall with a dolorous air.

Yea; they think of the days when yon crippled and
dim

Were stalwart, and blooming, and jocund, and
young;

With hope in each bosom, and health in each limb,
And a brow that no sorrow had shaded or wrung.

"Yea, He was once comely; and She was once fair;

"And courtings, and weddings, and christ'nings
they'd seen."

"Ay, the streets and blind alleys 'twere hard to
compare

With the fields, and the highways, and hedgerows
of green."

There were music, and sunshine, and sights that re-
joice;

Bright uplands, broad waters, and blue skies above;
And the wood-pigeon's coo, and the mother's soft
voice,

As she sang to the babe on her bosom, in love.

They had friends; they had kindred—of home the
sweet ties—

Their cradle's companions: their playmates from
school:

Blithe greetings, blithe faces, and blithe beaming
eyes:

Strong hands and stout hearts, of which Love was
the rule.

Long ago! Long ago! And they gaze round their
room—

Grime, cobwebs, and mildew—dry-rot and decay;
The air thick with dust, and the light sick with
gloom,

And the throb of the engine by night and by day:

For the lark's gush of song in the dew-spangled
corn,

The whirr of the spindle they wearily greet;

For the breath of the apple-trees where they were
born,

The reek of the chimneys and stench of the street.

For the holly-decked kitchen, a garret dim, drear;

No dresser bright garnished; no cosy fire-side;

No casement to open; no sunlight to cheer;

Sad, sad the last home, where the "old people"
bide!

For the winning young faces, the frolic and glee,

For the cheeks like the cherry, the eyes like the
sloe;

For the locks like the raven, the step springing
free;

Wither'd Eld, nipt with hunger and crazy with woe.

Never more shall they wander through forest and
glade;

Never more by the banks of the bright rivers roam;

Never more hear the cuckoo's voice in the dim shade;

Nor cross once again the sweet threshold of home.

There are graves in a churchyard that lies far
away,

Amid the lone hills that the clouds rest upon,
Green mounds and grey stones o'er the perishing
clay

Of the dear ones for ever lamented and gone.

O might they but lie where their darlings are laid,

One turf at their feet, and one text at their head!

O might they but sleep their last sleep in the shade

Of the elms that wave over their long-buried dead!

O might they!—But never—no never—'tis vain!

And they moan in their anguish and clutch the thin
air—

Their lot 'midst the scowl of the city, to 'plain,

And lay down the burden of life in despair:

And they turn to the wall, their sad faces death-
white,

And heart-broken cross their cold hands on their
breast:

Down sinks the red sun; and the shades of the
night

Gather o'er the wan traits of the pilgrim—at rest.

* * *

O apples, red apples, so golden and green,
On the gnarl'd mossy boughs 'mid bright emerald
leaves,

In clusters ripe swaying, and tempting of mien,
By the di'mond-paned lattice and thatch'd cottage
eaves!

O apples, red apples! Of childhood ye tell,
And the eyes of young urchins that gaz'd with de-
light;

But the old man is drooping; they're ringing his
knell,

And the scenes of his boyhood fade out of his sight.

* * *

"Where the apple-tree blossoms in spring they were
born;"

Where the green-linnet sings, and "the yellow corn
waves;"

But they die far away in a garret, forlorn,
And the stithe of the town stunts the grass on their
graves.

SLAVES OF THE RING.

OUR acquaintance, Mr. Bloxham, is forty-eight years old, and a steady drinker. He has not done a stroke of honest work, he has not performed a single useful action, for more than half his life. To eat and drink well, to wear fine clothes, to swagger in what he called good company, and to eschew anything so ungentee as labour, were the lofty ambitions of his early manhood. Educated at a public school, and in training for the bar, his father's allowance obtained him a few of these requisites, and his own credit did the rest. A handsome, well-built, rollicking fellow, with a merry eye and a rich, full voice, he soon gained considerable surface-popularity, and had the honour of being dubbed "Jolly Bloxham" in more than one convivial coterie. Just, however, when his acquaintance had become most numerous, and his social engagements and his debts had multiplied in equal proportion, Bloxham succumbed to a phase of human weakness from which the jolliest mortals are not exempt—he fell in love. The pretty, shy-faced,

dove-eyed, modest little daughter of his landlady had somehow reached a stray corner of his jovial heart, and, stooping from his lordly height of social superiority, Bloxham took the gentle creature to himself and married her. Be sure there was a chorus of surprise and indignation and pity from a vast number of people who thought so fine a fellow should have done better. "Thrown up the sponge!" "Married the girl at the lodging-house, and gone to the bad!" "Didn't think he'd been such a fool!" "Thought Bloxham was wider awake!" These and other genial commentaries were passed behind the bridegroom's back by his bosom friends; while on the poor little wife's side one or two hard relations, who had, as they said, "made their own way," shook their heads ominously, and hoped marrying above her wouldn't turn Lucy's head, nor make her sinful. But Bloxham had done a generous thing, and he knew it. Indeed, however unassuming his own nature might have been, and it cannot be said to have erred in that particular, he would have been more than mortal to have ignored this fact. He read admiration for his disinterested chivalry in the silent worship of his trustful bride, in the terms of the congratulatory speeches of his companions, and in the value of the imaginary "good things" he had thrown away. Viewed, however, by the stern cold light of arithmetic, and excluding all fanciful social belongings, the match was not such a very bad thing for Bloxham after all. Lucy's father had been a shopkeeper, it is true, and Bloxham's father was a small country squire. But she had an annuity of seventy pounds a year, whereas, when Bloxham, senior, died, a few months after his son's marriage, his affairs were in such a condition that Letters of administration were taken out by a creditor, and the entire proceeds were angrily squabbled over by that creditor's companions in misfortune. All Bloxham's professional advantages were, in a pecuniary sense, prospective. His showy abilities made him popular, but were not remunerative; and though well fitted by nature for the profession of his choice, all the rest depended upon the self-denial he should practise and the application he should display. He was much too dashing a personage to possess either of those useful qualities, and, to cut his story short, has been maintained, first by Lucy's nimble fingers, and subsequently by her natty little milliner's shop, any time these dozen years.

It was during her husband's first attack of delirium tremens, and after every available article of clothing and knick-knackery had been pawned or sold, that Mrs. Bloxham turned bread-winner; and from that time until now she has provided her husband with the means of indulging in his favourite recreation, besides nursing him through the fits of temporary insanity which that recreation has superinduced. He is at this time a pimply, bloated, watery-eyed, tremulous-handed, dishonest, maudlin, odious drunkard. She is an active, winning,

cheerful little body, who, to judge from her bearing in public, might never have known a care, and who still nourishes amid bitter secret tears her pride at having married a gentleman. If Bloxham would but fuddle and bemuse himself without indulging in extraneous vices, his wife would be, strange as it may sound, comparatively happy. That he should get habitually drunk has come to be recognised as part of his nature, and as no more to be guarded against or complained of than if he were cursed with a blighted limb or a deformed frame. This "is poor William's way," and his cleverness, the delight great people have taken in his society, and his lofty spirited pride, are told over tearfully, as if they were condonations of his offence. But, unhappily, another of poor William's ways is to be generous when in his cups, and, he will lend his jolly name to a boon-companion's bill, or will sign one of those useful instruments himself with a frequency which is ruinous to his wife. But for her husband's amiable weaknesses, and but for his money-borrowing for sustained fits of debauchery, she might long since have retired from business; while, as it is, a weary bitter fight with bankruptcy, a hard struggle to repair the breaches made in her commercial fortress, and a constant dread and anxiety as to the nature of the next assault upon it, are the rewards of as patient and heroic a fight with fortune on her part as was ever celebrated in song. The law of England handed the poor woman over to Bloxham when they went to church together, and in its infinite mercy and wisdom leaves her his chattel long after his vices have transformed him into a sodden and idiotic parody upon a man. The living body is chained to the dead one, and must pay the penalty of its association. Meanwhile, as the vagaries of the wretched toper become more and more reckless, and as in spite of every medical prophecy, that "no constitution can stand it, and the next attack must be the last," he persists in living on, there is little doubt that the Gazette and the workhouse will be the ultimate fate of both.

Another case. Polly Comber earns her two pounds a week at factory work, and is in constant employment. She is cursed with a husband who left her, years ago, but who turns up periodically to break up her home, to sell the bits of furniture she has gathered together laboriously, to seize upon her savings, and then to wallow in the mire again, leaving her to begin her nest-building for herself and the little children anew. In everything which elevates the human being above the brute she is as immeasurably the superior of her ruffian husband as the things of heaven are to the things of earth. She is prudent, self-denying, industrious, cleanly, God-fearing, virtuous. The man she married, is practically changed into a Beast. His individuality is become as distinct from that of the maniac and robber who swoops down upon her from time to time like some obscene bird of prey, as that of the people who lived long before she

was born has become when compared with her child at school. Yet because the hearty, kindly, merry-hearted workman she once loved and has lost won her troth and plighted her his own, she is doomed for all time to bear the burdens which his sullen, foul-mouthed, vicious anti-type may choose to heap upon her. In the worst days of American slavery we used to read of the over-hours by means of which some of the negroes accumulated savings and in time purchased their liberty. More affecting still were the efforts made by the freed men or freed women to purchase back their children. Our English slaves of the ring enjoy no over hours, and the whole of their earnings swell the base gains of their owners, and aggravate their own ill treatment. They cannot purchase their liberty. They cannot purchase the liberty of their children. They are tied body and soul to the demon of drink, or profligacy, or dishonesty, and there is no escape from his lashings and tortures on this side the grave. Our slaves are of both sexes; and the decent workman whose wife drinks, is in the same hapless plight as Lucy Bloxham or Polly Comber.

The law declares that a mistaken estimate of character shall be punished by a life-long sorrow, and many excellent and well-meaning people maintain the law to be right. One of these inveighed the other day from his place in the House of Commons, against interfering with a custom which is the "growth of ages," and with which, as he insisted, are identified in some mysterious manner the welfare of the English people and the prosperity of the country. That the marriage service would have to be altered if Mr. Lefevre's measure became law, and that "enter into a partnership with this man on equal terms" would have to be substituted for "love, honour, and obey," and that a variety of other things of a similarly terrific character would follow in its wake, were among the alarming prophecies launched for the edification of the House of Commons.

That matrimonial misery or family division would necessarily ensue is, however, disproved by the experience of America, and especially of New England. The whole tendency of American legislation, during the last twenty years, has been in the direction aimed at by Mr. Lefevre's bill; and in New England the principle has been in actual operation for the last dozen years. The eminent jurist Mr. Dudley Field vouches that this change has been also effected in the state of New York without any disastrous consequences. It is not found that affection is weakened, or that the natural respect for a husband's authority is withheld, because women are reinvested with—or, rather, are not deprived of—rights which seem justly to belong to every one above the level of a horse or dog. Much that was said against the technical provisions of the measure now before the House may be true. It may be that it is ill adapted for its purpose, and that Mr. Shaw Lefevre's honest gallantry may have overlooked some important objections to its details and probable working. But let the prin-

ciple be admitted that women are not mere chattels, that it is as possible for them to work, earn, save, and own, in the eyes of the law as it is in sober fact, and all else will follow. To such of our legislators as insist that because the Normans had female serfs whom they called wives, therefore the men of the present day should continue to keep educated and intelligent fellow-creatures with a halter of disability about their necks—to appeal against them to moderation, or humanity, or common sense, seems worse than useless. But the even state of opinion in the House and the casting vote of the Speaker entitle us to hope that the subject will yet receive impartial consideration. The committee appointed to consider it will have ample time to be true to their trust, and if an honest selection of witnesses be made, there can be little doubt as to the result. O! If we could all draw pictures of the men we have known to live meanly or cruelly upon the money earned or owned by their wives, what a wonderful portrait-gallery might be given to the world!

Marriage is to such men, a lottery in which there are all prizes and no blanks, and many of them have lived in as great comfort and luxury upon their commercially better-halves as if they were the most industrious and meritorious of their kind. The wedding-ring has been the magic talisman preserving them from the necessity of labour. Nor would this be such a crying scandal to the community if they could be satisfied with doing nothing. But idleness and viciousness are too closely allied to live separate long, and it follows that the man who lives upon a woman's earnings too often follows in the steps of such fellows as Bloxham and Comber. What circle of middle-class society is there which cannot point to a signal example of this kind? What poor working man or woman is there who, if not sufferers themselves, can point to workers in the same calling, or dwellers in the same street or court, whose lives are permanently made a burden by the operation of the law? There is, Heaven knows, little fear of woman being made unforgiving, or selfish, or unduly grasping, by any enactment that the wise men of St. Stephen's can pass. No human law affecting pounds shillings and pence, is likely to weaken the law of Nature; and the legislators who trouble themselves concerning the effect of their work, herein, upon the national heart, are like flies dreading the results of their contiguity to the wheel they buzz upon. Let those over-scrupulous gentlemen acquaint themselves with the annals of the poor. Let those professors of the dismal sciences dive below the calm world in which "portions," and settlements, and pin-money (all devices to escape the hard law) are marriage essentials. Let them gauge positions, and remember cases where the slow starvation of helpless children, the bitter mercies of the streets, the foul infliction of brutal wrong, are the conditions of a life from which there is no escape. Let them put themselves in the place of the hardworking

women so situated, and then let them say what they think of the sacred principle of confiscation. This is no sentimental grievance, no suggested extension of woman's rights, which can be condemned as fanciful, no proposition to interfere, however remotely, with the dignity or social privileges of any honest man. It is an attempt at emancipating slaves who are in our midst, and whose sufferings and hardships are not the less severe because they are not made a text for sermons or a theme for platform oratory. Certain well-informed newspapers tell us that the division and the "tie" in the House of Commons upon the second reading of Mr. Lefevre's bill, fairly represent the divided opinion of the country upon the propriety of amending the existing law; and we are placidly congratulated upon the matter having been referred to a committee, and so practically shelved for twelve months. Cannot the intervening time be employed in such a way as to make the result certain?

Mr. Lefevre has already done good service in helping to prevent the wholesale spoliation of our metropolitan commons; he took an active part in the organisation of a Preservation Society under whose auspices the battle of Hampstead Heath is on the point of being fought, with the public rights on one side, and Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson on the other. The author of the Married Woman's Property Bill has experienced the value of extraneous support to parliamentary action, when the strongholds of cupidity, ignorance, and prejudice, are to be assailed. But in his present crusade he can be helped far more easily than in his former. Neither antiquarian research, nor expensive survey, nor professional study of court rolls, nor a weary resuscitation of long-forgotten battles against encroachment is necessary. The first charwoman, or the nearest workshop, will be found replete with evidence. Any day's newspaper will have some sad case in point. If a score of men with leisure were to devote themselves to acquiring information on this one subject, we venture to say their discoveries, when published, would ensure an alteration in the law. Metaphysical hair-splitting as to the precise meaning to be attached to certain words, seems but sorry trifling, in the face of such misery and injustice as pervade the lower ranks of married life; and the first step to improvement is the recognition of those civil rights to which the citizen of either sex is honestly entitled. This is not a question of favour, but of simple abstract justice. Grant all that can be advanced as to the sanctity of the marriage ceremony, and the indissolubility of the marriage tie; grant that its permanence is enjoined by our religion, and essential to the well being of society; none the less, let us in common honesty protect the weak and injured from the effects of a legal and mercantile rendering of a sacred ordinance. To make all that a woman earns or owns, the property of another, is to keep her on the footing of a beast of burden,

and that is this right of might almost universally claimed by the Savage all the world over.

GROWTH OF A LONDON MYTH.

ONCE upon a time, "when I was a little tiny boy," I was brought from the country to a lodging in Kirby-street, Hatton-garden. It was before the railway era, and I travelled by the mail coach, and had a seat with the guard, and the privilege of admiring his red coat and handling his bugle. At that period Kirby-street was not wholly unfashionable. There was then as now a very considerable population of Italians in the neighbouring courts and alleys, engaged in the manufacture of optical instruments, and of plaster images and casts; but Hatton-garden, Ely-place, and Kirby-street, still contained private dwelling houses where native Londoners of a certain social position resided. It was in one of these that I dwelt for about two months, pet and favourite of the kindly and garrulous old lady who was mistress of the establishment. Of all the stories she told me, that of Lady Hatton fixed itself most firmly in my mind, partly because it was tragical and supernatural, but in a great degree because the very stones of the street seemed to prate of it, and Bleeding-heart Yard, a place with a ghastly name and a weird reputation, the scene of the final catastrophe, was within a stone's throw of the room where I sat listening to the dreadful recital. The story was to this effect:

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth there stood in what is now Cross-street, Hatton-garden, the suburban mansion of Sir Christopher Hatton, who by the favour of his sovereign—some people say because he was the most graceful dancer, and not because he was the ablest lawyer of his time—had been advanced to the position of lord high chancellor.

In this house, which was surrounded with pleasant gardens, and appears to have stood in about the centre of a space bounded by Holborn on the south, by Saffron-hill and Baldwin's-gardens on the east, by Leather-lane on the west, and by Hatton-wall on the north, Sir Christopher was accustomed at all proper seasons to hold high revel and entertain the principal people of his day.

When this eminent person was in his sunny youth, when he had neither acquired name nor fame nor royal favour, he was a constant attendant at the theatres of London. Oranges had been in the first year of Elizabeth newly introduced into Europe from China by the Portuguese, and had but recently found their way to England. Then, as now, a trade in the refreshing fruit was carried on both at the doors and in the interior of the theatres. Among the girls who plied this industry was one very handsome person, very poor, but very proud, with beautiful long dark hair, and dark eyes, that could flash either with holy or unholy fire. The gallant Sir Christopher bought some oranges

of her one day, and made her a pretty speech upon the happiness of the man, whoever he might be, who could hope to gain her affections. Thoughtless Sir Christopher! From the moment that her eyes met those of the gay young gentleman the lovely orange girl became the victim of one all-consuming desire. Sir Christopher bought many oranges of her as, every day when he came to the theatre, she threw herself in his path to attract his notice. Every day he made her many little flattering speeches. After a time he became somewhat annoyed to learn that the girl's attachment to him was so obvious as to have become a subject of banter among his friends. He was in no humour for an intrigue. But the colder he became, the warmer she grew. When he retreated, she pursued. When he was indifferent, she was enthusiastic. When he froze, she burned, and desperate thoughts took possession of her mind. It seemed to her as if she could neither live nor die, and that life without his love was infinitely worse than all the pangs of death. At this time, and long previously, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*—a very doleful ballad—was commonly sung in the streets:

The Devil in fryar's weeds appeared to me,
And straight to my request he did agree,
That I might have all things at my desire,
If I gave soul and body for his hire.

She knew this woful piece of doggerel by heart. If Faustus could find a devil to buy his soul—for the price of love and a term of earthly felicity—could she not find a devil to do her the same good turn? Oh, that she could! For many days and nights she called upon the Prince of Darkness, upon Satan, upon Lucifer, upon Mephistopheles, by every name that she thought powerful, to come to her assistance. There was no answer. At last, upon one cold and rainy night, when she was more than usually desperate and unhappy, she strayed towards the watermen's stairs at London-bridge, and was about to drown herself, when she became aware of a stranger, who was standing by her side. He was a young man in the bloom of beauty, had very sparkling blue grey eyes of the colour of wood smoke, and a thick bushy beard and moustache of a hue between yellow and red, white regular teeth, a smile that was rather haughty and condescending than attractive or fascinating, and such beautiful white hands as might have belonged to a lady, and never could be supposed to have been employed in hard or dirty work. He was dressed in a suit of black velvet—all black from top to toe, with the exception of his hose and shoe ribbons and the jaunty feather in his cap, all of which were of scarlet.

"So you think of jumping into the river," he said, in a grave tone of voice; "but would not that be foolish as well as wicked?"

She started, though she did not in the least imagine who he could be. He looked kind, however, and she simply replied, "I am very miserable."

"But you are young and lovely, and you may yet find happiness, and plenty of it, if you will only seek it in the right manner. I know your history. You love Sir Christopher Hatton. Yes, you love him, and he does not love you in return. A very common case!"

"Mine is no common case," replied the dark-eyed girl, with startling emphasis, looking straight at her visitor. "If he cannot love me, I will die. Life without him is hourly misery."

"And with him would be hourly bliss, of course. I know all that," continued the stranger, very coolly, if not sarcastically. "Listen to me! I am a bliss merchant. I deal in the article. I have a great stock at my disposal."

"Then give me some of it for the love of Heaven," she said, clasping her hands, looking up in his face, and appearing even to his eyes to be exceedingly beautiful.

"Merchants don't *give*," said he. "You, for instance, don't give away oranges! You sell them. Giving is not in my line, or I should soon be a bankrupt, rich as I am; and if I were fool enough to be liberal, it would not be for love of the place you mention."

"Sell me joy, then—sell me the love of Sir Christopher Hatton; make him love me as I love him, and if the bliss can be but mine for seven days, you shall name your own price, even if it be my soul, provided you can get his also, and we can both go into your dark kingdom together."

"Fair and softly," said Lucifer, if it were indeed he, and who else *could* it be? "I can only deal with one person at a time. You and I can do our business first. He and I, if possible, can do our business afterwards. In my little transactions with human kind, I have but one price—which is the soul. Will you sell me yours?"

"I will," she replied, with a slight shudder, "for his love; warm, passionate, undivided, for seven days."

"Stupid girl! you must have a very bad opinion of me, to think I could entrap you into such a miserable bargain as that. No! no! I have some heart and conscience, though you may not believe it. What do you say to seven weeks?"

"Better, oh better!"

"Seven months?"

"Bliss undescribable!"

"Seven years?"

"Oh, do not mock me! If I had seven souls, I would sell them all to you, for such a price as that."

There was not much talk between the two after this. Seven years was the term agreed upon, and the price was to be her immortal soul at the end thereof. The stranger produced a parchment, wrote out the agreement in a very neat lawyer-like hand, read it over to her, and all was ready for her mark. This, as everybody knows, must in such transactions be made with blood.

"You are not afraid of the prick of a needle?" asked her companion, smiling; and before she

could reply, he took hold of her by her beautiful plump arm, squeezed a sharp diamond ring that was on his finger against it, and drew just one drop of red, ripe, rich blood. He produced a pen from his doublet, dipped the point in the liquid, placed it in her hand, and showed her where to place her mark. She did as she was requested. The stranger blew upon the mark to dry it—his breath was hot no doubt—then folded up the document, and placed it carefully in his pocket.

"Now," said he, "fair and noble lady—for I hereby create you a countess—let me see what title would suit you best? The Countess di Sidonia San Felice? That will do! See you don't forget it! You will want a great deal of money. Nothing is to be done without gold. I myself, though I do not value it, cannot manage my business without it. Were there no gold in the world, I verily believe there would be little work left for me. Take this ring, and whenever you want cash, however much or however little, rub it all round with the tip of your right forefinger, and you will find in your purse, or at your feet, the exact sum you have thought of. Just try the experiment."

She took the ring, rubbed it as directed, and said, "One hundred gold pieces." She felt a sudden weight in her pocket, and looked both alarmed and pleased.

"Take them out and count them," said he. "If you had named a million it would have been just the same; but as you would have found the mass rather heavy, I think you need not call for such a quantity, except on the great occasions when less will not suffice. And now, countess, you must act the part of a great lady—I know you can do it—and leave me to work for you in the proper quarter. I will perform my part of the contract like a gentleman. My word is my bond. Having done so—I will not trouble you with my company uninvited—until this day seven years hence, when, whether you invite me or not, I shall come and pay my respects to you. It will be necessary, however, in the mean while, until I have made the man of your choice your own for seven years, which I truly hope may be happy and delicious years to you—on my honour as a gentleman I swear it—that you and I should be sometimes seen together. I am, remember it well, the Duke di Sidonia San Felice, and you are my niece. I shall introduce you into good society. If I am at any time disagreeable to you, or if the thought of our little bargain causes you any annoyance, just give me a look—I am skilful in looks, and need no language to tell a person's thoughts—and I will relieve you of my presence. But don't, for your own sake, try to get rid of me in a pet or temper. And before I say farewell let me give you a word of advice. Don't make love to Sir Christopher. Don't run after him. Don't let him know that you care a straw for him. Let him be the wooer. Let him sigh his soul away at your feet; and if you have a little scorn to

bestow upon him, not too much, mind you, just a little judicious tiny bit of scorn, dart it at him from those lovely black eyes of yours, and he will come to you as slavishly and affectionately as if he were your lapdog. I am an old stager in these matters, and have been in love myself—a long, long time ago. Farewell, sweet countess!"

The next time that Sir Christopher went to the theatre there was no orange girl to offer him or any one else oranges, at which, to say truth, he was rather pleased than otherwise, for the orange girl, in consequence of the jests of his friends, had become a bore. He met, at the entrance, his friends, the Earls of Southampton and Pembroke, both great patrons of the drama. They asked him if he had seen the new Spanish beauty, who, for the last two days, had dazzled the eyes of all beholders. She had suddenly appeared in London, no one exactly knew from whence, and was accompanied by her uncle, a Spanish grandee and magnifico of the highest class, a grave old gentleman, with a highly intellectual face, who dressed in black velvet, with red hose, and shoe ribbons, wore a red plume in his cap, and a cross of diamonds upon his breast worth millions of money. Sir Christopher had neither seen nor heard; but, entering the theatre, the lady and her uncle were pointed out to him. Such glorious beauty in a woman, such calm dignity and serene wisdom in a man, he thought his eyes had never before beheld. Long before the performances were over he had asked Lord Southampton to introduce him personally to the duke, who had, as he was told, brought letters of introduction both to him and Lord Pembroke. The fair countess was an apt scholar, and before three weeks had passed she had half of the "golden youth" of London at her feet, attracted quite as much by her reputed wealth as by her undoubted beauty. And she possessed, not only these two great magnets for attracting and fixing men's admiration, but a ready wit, and could hold her own worthily against all the beaux-esprits and amiable cynics of the time. The duke, on his part, favoured Sir Christopher greatly, took pleasure in his society, entertained him with his learning, and charmed him with his conversation, for the duke had seen so much of the world, and was such a delicately flavoured cynic, that it was impossible for any one to be long in his society without recognising in him a very remarkable as well as a very charming person. Encouraged by the countenance of this high personage, and daily more and more smitten with the charms of the countess, who gave him, however, but very slight encouragement, while she threw her brightest smiles and most winning glances at some one or other of his many rivals, Sir Christopher became, what the countess had become when an orange girl, head over ears in love. He finally took courage to offer heart and hand, name and fortune, to his brilliant enslaver, and, to his great distress, though scarcely to his surprise—considering from how

many suitors, young, handsome, noble, and rich, she might choose—was summarily rejected.

"I will not be married for money," said the countess, "but for myself alone. Could you love me if I were poor? If, for instance, I earned my daily bread by selling oranges at the doors of the theatre?"

"I could," said Sir Christopher, not without some surprise at the mention of oranges—[a question put to himself without words, "Had she, too, heard that silly gossip about the orange-girl, and was she jealous?"]—"and only wish that you were a peasant girl, with no other dowry than your loveliness and your angelic sweetness of disposition, that I might make you the offer I make now, and prove to you how dearly and how truly I love you."

The countess looked incredulous, though she was beginning to feel very happy; but having, from the company she had lately kept, learned to add the cunning of the serpent to the gentleness of the dove, and thinking, moreover, that Sir Christopher was fast coming into the right road in which she wished him to travel, she dallied with him yet a little.

"I am too young to marry," she said. "I do not know whether I shall marry at all. If I do, I am not sure whether I should like to marry an Englishman. In any case, I cannot marry without my uncle's consent, and I think he objects to Englishmen."

Sir Christopher, as may be supposed, did not lose heart of grace from the results of this conversation. Seeking an interview with the duke, who seemed to take an almost paternal interest in his fortunes, he ascertained that so far from having any dislike to Englishmen—or Englishwomen—this great magnifico esteemed them both very highly—especially the ladies; and next to being a Spanish grandee, he thought it the finest thing in the world to be an English nobleman. He also ascertained—or, rather, hoped he had ascertained—that the saucy countess was not nearly so indifferent to himself as she pretended, and that there was no one among her many suitors upon whom she looked with greater, if with so much favour.

"When I was your age," said the duke, "I was never very satisfied to take no for an answer in matters of the heart, unless I discovered that the superior attractions of a rival had not left me the ghost of a chance. In the latter case I summoned my philosophy to my aid, and cooled myself with it as speedily as I might. It seems to me, signor, that you do not require any cooling at present, and that, on the contrary, a little more heat might possibly be advantageous. My fair niece is, as you may have observed, a proud woman, and the prouder a woman is the more ardently she loves—if she loves at all. That, at least, is my experience. As for proud women, they are my especial favourites. I love them dearly; for of such is my kingdom."

The duke and the countess managed so well, and Sir Christopher became so importunate a wooer, that the marriage was agreed

upon, and, for a wonder, Queen Elizabeth did not object to it. Higher powers than the majesty of England were at work, and the marriage, though not made in Heaven, was made in a place where a great deal of passionate work is done. It was celebrated with great pomp and festivity, though it was remarked as unfortunate that the good Duke of Sidonia San Felice was taken very suddenly ill on the night preceding the ceremony, and could not attend in church to give away the bride. Sir Christopher considerably and respectfully hinted that the marriage might be delayed for a day or two to permit of the duke's presence. "No! no!" said the duke, "that would be unlucky. Even were I at the point of death, which I am not—though sometimes in my sad moments I feel that I should like to die—I would not consent to be such a mar-joy as that, and to stand between two loving hearts, with my miserable ailments. Go, my son, and get married, and may joy go with you." The duke recovered next day so suddenly, and looked so remarkably well, that ill-natured people (people always *are* so ill natured) began to think it strange, and to recal the fact that no one had ever seen him at church or chapel since he came to England. He was not a religious man, evidently.

Tradition, if her voice were truly represented by the good old dame from whom I gathered this story, has not recorded whether in this instance the course of true love ran smooth, and whether they were happy; but that they lived together, to all outward appearance, as man and wife should, decently and honourably, according to their station, seems obvious, from the fact that Sir Christopher, seven years after the nuptials, gave a splendid ball, of which his wife did the honours, and at which all the notabilities of London were present. Lady Hatton had for the last year been in very indifferent health. She seemed unhappy, but her lord could never understand exactly what was the matter; and though she was attended by the most eminent physicians of the day, the only explanation they could give of her malady was that it was mental, and that she was suffering from some secret sorrow, which she seemed disinclined to divulge. Her uncle had disappeared from England very shortly after her marriage, and explained to Sir Christopher, as a reason for not keeping up a correspondence with him, that he had made up his mind to see the world, to travel to the remotest ends of the earth in search of adventures. "In fact," he said, in a jocose humour, "I am like a roaring lion, I like to go about the earth seeking whom I may devour. I speak metaphorically, of course, and mean *what* I may devour in the shape of new excitement, and fresh experience of men and their ways." He promised, however, to leave Lady Hatton a clue to his whereabouts in case he should ever be wanted. But he never was wanted. Sir Christopher mentioned him but rarely, and noticed particularly whenever he did so that Lady Hatton seemed uneasy,

as if she would be glad to banish his remembrance from her mind. Sir Christopher, after an ineffectual attempt to discover whether there had been a quarrel between them, forbore to speak upon the subject after the first two years of their marriage, and had almost forgotten that such a person as the Duke of Sidonia San Felice had ever existed. For the month preceding the great ball Lady Hatton had seemed more than usually unhappy. She could not bear to be left alone even for an instant, and would often break out into hysterical sobs, followed by hysterical laughter distressing to witness.

"Do you think," she said, one evening to Sir Christopher, as they sat in the library, after a day in which some portion of her old happiness seemed to have revisited her, "that there is any truth in the story of Dr. Faustus, who sold himself to Lucifer for worldly power and dominion?"

"A stupid old legend," said the practical Sir Christopher—"an absurd superstition. No doubt people do give their souls to the devil, when they commit sin, persist in sin, and die unrepenting."

"Repentance makes a difference, then?" said the lady. "And suppose I sold my soul to Lucifer, for love of you, and were to repent that I did so, could Lucifer claim my soul?"

Sir Christopher smiled. "My dear good wife," said he, "you are certainly unwell. Your health is injured because you have been left too much alone lately. I shall give half-a-dozen grand dinners and balls, and invite a large company each time. We shall be merry, and you shall be the very queen of all the joy and festivity. Cheer up, love. You have youth, beauty, riches, friends, and your husband's heart. What more do you require?"

"Peace of mind!" she replied, with a shudder, as some painful thought flashed upon her brain, and lighted up her dark eyes with a tragic light. "I have sold myself to Lucifer, or I have dreamt so."

"But who is so silly—pardon the expression—as to lose their peace of mind for a dream?"

"My dream was a reality, or so like a reality that I cannot tell the difference."

"Many dreams are. I have had such dreams myself, especially when I have been out of health. We shall cure all that for you if you will trust to my care and attention." And Sir Christopher gave her as warm an embrace as if they had only been married seven days instead of close upon seven years, and the lady for awhile was comforted.

The great ball at last took place, and it seemed to all present that never had Lady Hatton looked so exceedingly beautiful; that her dark full eyes had never gleamed with such vivid lightning glances upon her hosts of flatterers and admirers, or that her pretty little feet had ever twinkled so elegantly, so joyously, and so deftly in the dance. Sir Christopher was delighted, and convinced, moreover, that, after all, her only ailments were the results of the

too great solitude, in which his increasing avocations had compelled him to leave her—a solitude which he firmly resolved, should not continue, if wealth could bring amusement, or change of scene, or any possible recreation that might divert her mind, and occupy her best faculties. It was five minutes before midnight by the great hall clock, when a new and important visitor was announced—no less a person than the long-lost Duke di Sidonia San Felice, in the well-known and graceful costume in which he was so familiar to Sir Christopher, the suit of black velvet, the scarlet hose and shoe ribbons, and the jaunty scarlet plume in his cap. Lady Hatton turned red, then ghastly pale, at the sight, and it was thought by those close to her that she would drop to the ground. But she braced up her nerves as the duke approached her, and took her by the hand. He smiled with a grave sweet smile, and said softly, yet in a voice that all around could distinctly hear: "I am punctual." Then turning to Sir Christopher, he said: "You did not expect me. Of course not! Do not disturb the dance. How lovely your wife looks! She has been a good wife to you, I am sure." Sir Christopher put his hand upon his heart. "I knew she would be," continued the duke. "Such women as she are rare in this wicked world. I have a little bit of family news to communicate to her. We can sit together for a few minutes, can we not, in the ante-room yonder among the flowers? What lovely flowers you have got, Sir Christopher. My taste exactly." He had taken Lady Hatton by the hand, and he led her with the utmost respect and gallantry from amid the crowd. The dance went on, but Lady Hatton never reappeared; neither did the Duke di Sidonia San Felice. After the lapse of an hour, Sir Christopher, not knowing what had become of her, and ardently desiring not to make a scene or a scandal, informed his guests that my lady had been taken unwell, but not seriously, and had gone to bed. The dance went on; every one was joyous except poor Sir Christopher, who was glad when the last of the guests had departed, and he was left alone to ponder over the very singular disappearance of his lady, and to wonder when she would return to him.

In the morning a very horrible sight presented itself in the yard of Hatton-garden. The great pump that stood in the middle was all stained and belotted with blood and brains, as if some one's head had been dashed and broken against it. On the ground lay a human heart in a pool of blood, and round about were shreds and tatters of female attire, and fragments of gold chains and loose diamonds and other jewels such as had been worn by Lady Hatton on the previous evening. There were no traces of a body, but there was a deep hole in the ground as if it had been made by a thousand thunderbolts, and the whole place smelt awfully sulphurous and mephitic. Lucifer had claimed his own. Thus had ended the bright career of the beautiful but wicked Lady Hatton. And, to this day, added the good old

lady who told me the legend—"Bleeding Heart-yard" stands close by to prove the story true.

It was clearly a case—though it was not till many years afterwards that I was wise enough to understand it—like that of Tenterden Steeple and the Goodwin Sands. The story had not made Bleeding Heart-yard, but Bleeding Heart-yard had made the story. The name impressed the popular imagination, and the popular imagination evolved and produced the legend that was to account for it. And what, asks the practical reader who does not believe in ghosts or devils (though he may, perhaps, have some degree of faith in Mr. Home the medium), is the true origin of "Bleeding Heart-yard?" Two explanations are presentable, either of which may be the correct one. The first is that the ancient names of the wall-flower—that sweet smelling ornament of the garden—that in the Language of Flowers is emblematic of "poverty," were the "Blood-wort" and the "Bleeding Heart," and that one of the yards of Sir Christopher Hatton's residence having been overgrown with it, acquired in early times a name to which later superstition, interpreting too literally, gave a ghastly interpretation. The second is that, in the days before the Reformation, there stood at a corner of the Hatton-garden domain, an inn or hostelry known as "The Bleeding Heart," and that the courtyard of the aforesaid hostelry, when it had ceased to be a hostelry, retained its ancient name among a new generation. "The sign of the Bleeding Heart," says Messrs. Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten, in their interesting History of Signboards, "was the emblematical representation of the five sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary, viz., the heart of the Holy Virgin pierced with five swords.

Thus do myths grow; and thus, perhaps, from as small beginnings, combined with the love of the mystic and the supernatural, that seems inherent in human nature, have sprung up nine-tenths of the legends of Greece and Rome and of all the great nations of antiquity.

THE LITTLE OLD GENTLEMAN.

"WOULD you like to look at the Times, sir? Singular trial that of Risk Allah Bey against the Daily Telegraph."

The speaker was a curious little old man, cleanly dressed, cleanly shaved, with short crisp white hair, and a face like a red pippin: such a face as is hardly ever seen out of this country, and even here rarely, save among farmers, game-keepers, or others who are much in the open air, and at all seasons. This little—for he was very small indeed as to size—this little old gentleman, was encountered in a first-class smoking-carriage, on the South-Western Railway.

"Curious trial that before the Lord Chief Justice," continued the old gentleman, as if he wished to promote further conversation.

"I was once tried for murder myself:" with a pleasant smile. "Yes," said the little old gentleman, "and" (looking pleasanter than ever), "very nearly hung, too. I did not get off free. I was sentenced to transportation for life; went through seven years of it; and then they pardoned me for what I had never done.

"You see," said the little old gentleman, smiling more than ever, as the five other smokers in the carriage stared at him: "You see, I was for many years a cattle-merchant in London. My business consisted in receiving from abroad—from Holland, Germany, Normandy, or wherever I could form a connexion—oxen, cows, sheep, pigs, some on my own account, others to be sold on commission for correspondents who sent their animals to me for sale. The trade was a profitable one. Every beast sent over on my account was fully insured, so that if it died on its passage I came upon the insurance company. I had very few bad debts; and, taking one thing with another, I may fully have calculated upon realising at least twenty-five per cent on my capital every three months. In other words, I got a profit of a hundred per cent per annum on the money I had commenced business with.

"But with money comes the desire for more. There was a time before I began to deal in cattle, when I thought myself rich if at the end of a year I had a couple of hundred pounds in bank over and above my expenses for the past twelve months. Now it was otherwise. I lamented that I had not always an idle balance of fifteen hundred or two thousand pounds. I was fond of money for money's sake. I could not make money fast enough for my wishes, in the cattle trade, and therefore determined to do a little in the loan and discounting way.

"It is nearly twenty years ago, and I have gone through a deal of trouble since. My system was never to put too many eggs in one pot—never to lend very much to any single person—but to lend many small amounts to various people. I used to answer the advertisements of tradesmen in difficulties, and, if I found that a borrower had good security to offer, I would lend him perhaps thirty or forty pounds, taking ten pounds for the accommodation for a month, and much more in proportion for longer periods. One of my clients was a printer with a small business, near what was then called the New-road, now Marylebone-road. He had often borrowed twenty, thirty, and once as much as sixty pounds from me, and had always repaid me to the day. The security he gave me was always the same, the joint note of hand of himself and his brother, a grocer up Hackney way. The name of this borrower was Strange—Edward Strange. He was in a delicate state of health, always suffering from his chest, and in severe winters he used to be laid up for weeks together with a bad cough. He was a widower, without children.

"One day Strange came to me and said that he had a very excellent offer to enter into partnership with a printer, who had been esta-

blished in business several years. The sum required to be paid for the partnership was three hundred pounds, and he asked me to advance him that amount upon the security of a policy of insurance for one thousand pounds upon his own life. On inquiry, I found that, years before, Strange had, when a young and healthy man, effected an insurance upon his life for five hundred pounds, and afterwards increased it to one thousand pounds. This policy he had always managed to keep up, and still wished that it should not relapse. As it had been running on for nearly twenty years, and as he paid a very small premium, and was now in bad health, the insurance company would have been glad to purchase it back. Therefore, after looking at the affair in every possible way, I came to the conclusion that the security was good, and that I might safely advance the sum of three hundred pounds upon the security of the policy being endorsed over to me. This was done, and I advanced the money! Gentlemen, the worst day's business I ever did in my life.

"In general a creditor sees but little of his debtors, whether they are few or many. The man who owes money generally avoids the individual to whom he owes it. But it happened otherwise with Strange and myself. With the new business that he had bought, he was not expected, nor even wished, by his partner to interfere; and his own indifferent health made it very desirable that he should be as free as possible from the confined air of the close printing rooms. The partnership he had purchased secured him a certain amount of income, which, together with what he had besides, allowed him to go about in divers parts of the country, travelling being much recommended by his medical attendant. Knowing that I had to make weekly trips to Harwich, and that I had often to go to Rotterdam in the way of business when looking after cattle, he asked me whether he could be of use to me as a clerk? He asked for no salary, only his actual travelling expenses; and for this he was to keep my accounts, write and copy my letters, and make himself generally useful. The bargain was a good one for both parties. On the one hand my business was increasing every week, and having to knock about a great deal at fairs, and to see a great many dealers, I had no time to look properly after my accounts, which sometimes got rather complicated. On the other hand, Strange had enough to live upon, but not enough to pay travelling expenses with comfort. Having been friends for several years, when we travelled together we always had our meals in common; and in country places, or where the inns were very full, we generally took a double-bedded room between us.

"After a time I found Strange's assistance of such value to me that I was able to increase my connexions very materially indeed. Being a shrewd man, he was able at the end of a twelve-month to make purchases and conduct my business as well as I could. This led, naturally enough, to a partnership being formed between

us, by the terms of which I was to lend him five hundred pounds to put into the business, of which he was to have a fourth of the net profits. As surety for the five hundred pounds, he insured his life for another thousand. Thus, when we commenced working together as partners, Strange owed me eight hundred pounds, and I held policies of insurance on his life for two thousand pounds.

"Our business trips used generally to last from a week to a fortnight. Sometimes we were detained at the port to which we had brought the animals, for four or five days, awaiting the means of shipping them to England; for it is not every steamer that will take bullocks, or sheep, or pigs, as cargo. Sometimes, one of us would remain in London conducting the sales of such animals as his partner sent him from abroad. And this had happened when the event of which I am now going to tell you took place.

"As Strange could speak French very well, I often sent him alone to the fairs in Normandy and Brittany, nearly always going myself to those in Holland and the north of Germany. It was somewhere about the end of a certain May that he went over to France, intending to remain there about six weeks, and go from one fair to another on a certain round. Three or four consignments of beasts had reached me in London, and the last was to come over in a day or two. My partner had visited all the fairs he intended to go to, and was to join me. I wrote him at Southampton, where he was to land, saying that I would meet him there, take a look at the cattle he had bought, and send some to London, and go with the rest to some of the southern counties, where there was likely to be a market that would suit my book.

"I reached Southampton on the day named, and met Strange. We dined together in the afternoon at a small inn near the docks, and, finding we could not get two bedrooms, engaged a double-bedded room for the night. Then we began to square up accounts and spent the afternoon seeing how we stood in the matter of money. But something that Strange had done, vexed me sorely. He had, in the face of what I had written to him in London to the contrary, paid some two pounds a head more for about thirty or forty beasts than we should ever realise. When I told him how foolishly he had acted, he answered me back that he had done his best, and that he had as much right as I had to speculate with our joint funds. To this I replied that, although he was undoubtedly a partner in the concern, it was I who had put in all the capital, and that he had only an interest of twenty-five per cent. in the profits. His rejoinder, I remember well. He said that if he died, I would get all the money he owed me and more. To this I retorted in a passion, that I knew it, and that I did not care how soon he died. All this wrangling took place in the coffee-room of the inn, before the girl who waited on us, the

cook of the house, the barmaid, the landlady, and the landlady's husband. The latter, when he saw we were getting angry, tried to make friends between us, but in vain. We were each annoyed at what the other had said, as well as at our own folly, and neither would be the first to say he was sorry for what had passed.

About six o'clock I took up my hat and went to see some friends in the town. When I got back it was past eleven o'clock, and Strange, the housemaid told me, had been in bed and asleep more than an hour. I paid my share of the bill, for I intended starting early, went up-stairs, found Strange fast asleep, and went to bed myself. Next morning I was called at five, packed my bag, swallowed a cup of coffee, and in half an hour was on my way to London. On leaving the inn I told the porter that my companion was asleep, and that, as he was only going by the ten o'clock coach to Brighton, they need not call him yet. I should not forget to tell you that while I was dressing in the morning Strange awoke, and that we shook hands over our dispute of the previous day. We moreover agreed to change our plans, and Strange was to meet me in London on the next day. As I was closing my carpet-bag he asked me to lend him one of my razors: a thing which I had the greatest objection to (for if I am particular about anything I possess, it is about my razors), but having only just made up my difference with him, I could hardly refuse him so small a favour.

"The days I am writing of were before railways had extended to Southampton. Leaving the latter place at half-past five in the morning, it was half-past six in the evening before I got to town. I went to bed, got up next day, and, while I was sitting at breakfast with my wife, our servant told me that two gentlemen wished to speak to me. I went down to see them, and, before I could open my mouth to ask them what they wanted, found myself with handcuffs on, arrested for the murder of Edward Strange.

"It seems that, finding Strange did not come down by half-past nine, the porter went up to call him. He found the door locked, but no key in it. After knocking some time on the outside, the door was broken open, and poor Strange was found, with his throat cut from ear to ear, and a razor in his hand. The key of the door was afterwards found in the coffee-room, under the very bench on which I had sat to drink my cup of coffee before starting.

"I was brought before the magistrate at Bow-street the next morning, and was by him sent down to Southampton to await the result of the coroner's inquest upon my partner. The verdict was wilful murder, and, after commitment by the magistrate to the sessions, I was put on trial for my life at Winchester.

"The trial lasted only a few hours. It was fully proved that Strange and myself had quarrelled and had high words the night before, and that I had said I did not care how soon he died, so that I could recover the money I had lent him. A great deal was made of the fact

that by Strange's death I should be entitled to the insurance upon his life to the amount of two thousand pounds, by which I should be a clear gainer of one thousand two hundred. It was further shown that the razor found in poor Strange's hand was mine, and three medical men declared their conviction that, although that instrument was undoubtedly used to kill the dead man, it must have been placed in his hands after death. Moreover, there were not only evident marks of a struggle about the bed and bedclothes, but Strange's throat was cut from right to left, which no one could have done unless he had been a left-handed man, which Strange was not. Then, again, the fact of the bedroom door being locked, and the key hid close to where I had breakfasted, told fearfully against me. It was clear that Strange could not by any possibility have cut his own throat, and then locked the door of his room on the outside. It was attempted by my counsel, to throw discredit upon this part of the evidence. The learned gentleman tried very hard to elicit something which might even lead the jury to imagine that the door had been locked after the murder, and that some person unknown had unknowingly let the key drop in the coffee-room. But it was of no avail whatever. It was clearly proved that the key had been inside the door when I went up to bed, and that it had never been seen again until it was found in the coffee-room. My defence tried hard to make out that some person likely to commit the murder might have been in the house on that day, but all of no use. As the trial went on, even I, who knew my innocence, could not help allowing to myself that the evidence, though purely circumstantial, was very strong against me. The only points in my favour were, that, on the day of the murder I was supposed to have committed, I travelled up to London, and had not the least appearance of a man who had anything on his mind. Again, Strange was known to have had on his person a gold watch, and a purse containing a few sovereigns and twenty five-pound notes, the numbers of which latter were ascertained at the bank at Southampton, where he had procured them in exchange for a bank-post bill. The watch had been taken, and was never traced; the sovereigns had also disappeared; but the bank-notes had been exchanged at the Bank of England on the day after the murder, and before I, as I fully proved, had any communication whatever with any one in London. Of this last point my counsel made the most, but it did not help me much, if anything. The jury retired, and, after deliberating about half an hour, returned into court and declared, through their foreman, that I was guilty of the wilful murder of Edward Strange.

"Gentlemen, a man who has gone through that ordeal—who has heard the jury pronounce him guilty of capital crime, and heard the judge pass sentence of death upon him—a man, I say, gentlemen, who has gone through that ordeal, and still lives to tell the tale, may (or am I pre-

sumptuous?) be looked upon as a man who has really gone through what, in these days, would be called a sensational time. I heard every word the foreman of the jury said, and found myself wondering what the judge's black cap—of which every one has heard, but few have seen—would be like. Then I was in a kind of dream for a time, until I heard the words condemning me to be hanged by the neck until I was dead. A sensational effect upon me, gentlemen, or am I presumptuous? And will you favour me, sir, with a light?

"In spite of appearances," said this little old gentleman, smoking with exceeding relish, "my friends did not believe me to be guilty of the fearful crime for which I was to be hanged by the neck until I was dead, in ten days after the trial. They moved heaven and earth to obtain a commutation of my sentence, and, after a great deal of trouble, they succeeded. At the time of which I speak, there was in England a temporary, but very strong, reaction against capital punishment. I cannot recollect all the circumstances of the case, but in a trial for murder two men had been condemned to death and duly executed, and shortly after they had been hanged by the neck until they were dead their supposed victim made his appearance, well and hearty. The public press took up the question of not hanging upon circumstantial evidence, and I benefited to the extent of my life by the temporary excitement. I was respited, and condemned to transportation for life, and very shortly afterwards—for in those days transportation was in full swing—found myself on my way out to Van Diemen's Land, a convict 'lifer.'

"For seven long years, gentlemen, did I undergo this punishment for a crime of which I was perfectly innocent. Curiously enough, the man who really had murdered poor Strange, as he afterwards confessed, went out in the same ship with me, condemned to seven years' transportation for burglary. He must have heard me tell my story and declare my innocence over and over again; for in the colony we worked a long time together in the same gang. He was afterwards assigned to a master who lived near the prison where I had to slave out my time, as in those days 'lifers,' whose sentence had been commuted for capital punishment, were never allowed to leave the chain gangs. But, after three years in Van Diemen's Land, this real murderer took to his old trade of burglary. To avoid being captured, he fled to the bush, and on a party of police being sent after the band to which he belonged, he shot a constable in cold blood. He was captured, sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead, and two days before his execution confessed that he had murdered, at Southampton, a person called Strange, for which offence another man had

been sentenced to death. His statement was taken down, and it was exact. It appeared that he had been hidden for several hours in the inn, intending to steal whatever he could lay his hands on. Early in the morning he had found his way into poor Strange's room, hoping to pick up something before the house was astir. But his entrance awoke Strange, who struggled for a few minutes with him, and kept hold of him. The razor which I had lent Strange being still lying on the bed, he murdered his victim with it, and then put it into Strange's hand, in order to make it appear that he had committed suicide. He secured the watch, the purse, and the bank-notes, of the murdered man, and stole out of the house, locking the door of the bedroom on the outside, and hiding the key. He declared that he had got into Strange's room before I left the house, and that for some time after his fear was lest I should come back. Had I done so, the murder would, in all probability, have been prevented.

"When the statement made by this convict had been duly verified, and when certain references had been made to the home authorities, I was duly liberated. That is to say, gentlemen, I obtained the royal pardon for having committed a crime which I never committed. And very sensible I am, gentlemen, of the royal clemency. Though it seems odd."

"All tickets, gentlemen, all tickets ready!"

The train had reached the ticket platform at Vauxhall.

"Ah! Yes!" said the little old gentleman, producing his: "Mine's a Return Ticket; but it had very nearly been otherwise!"

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